THE DECLINE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

1880 - 1900

by

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A B S T R A C T

This thesis is designed to be a study of the Liberal Party between 1880 and 1900, undertaken in order to ascertain the reasons for its decline in those years. My attempt is to show that the seeds of the Party's later decay can be found in this period, and that the study of these twenty years is, in fact, essential to an understanding of the crucial changes in the structure of British politics which have subsequently taken place.

There were, I feel, several reasons for the Liberal decline. One is to be found in the revolt of many of the middle classes against orthodox liberal utilitarian ideals. Thus, whereas advanced bourgeois thinkers between 1820 and 1870 had mostly been laissez-faire Radicals of the Manchester School variety, those who followed were socialist, or at least collectivist, in their ideas. A second reason was the revolt of many of the working classes against the misery which was their lot and their gradual adherence to socialism.

These two major changes have been taken as background; the major emphasis of this thesis, however, is on the Liberal Party itself. I have studied its leaders, their concepts, their quarrels, and the political events of the twenty years; I have tried to show how Gladstonian Liberalism reacted to the new forces in the late

Victorian period and how its failure to do so adequately was in part inherent in its very nature. The Liberal Party was a phenomenon unique to an age which believed in "free enterprise" and a laissez-faire state; once these beliefs were threatened, so too was the party which practised them. Other factors making for Liberal decline included the Home Rule issue, the new Imperialism, and the defection of Joseph Chamberlain. None of these, however, was as important as the first; Liberalism, by its very nature, contributed to its own destruction. I have tried to show how this process took place.

PREFACE

This thesis has been written in an effort to ascertain the causes and character of the decline of the Liberal Party between 1880 and 1900. By many observers and even students it is often felt that the cause of the Liberal disasters of the 1920's is to be found in the First World War and in the conflict of personalities which resulted therefrom. I feel that this attitude is an over-simplification of the actual circumstances and that the true cause of the later developments may be found in the 1880-1900 period.

In writing this thesis I have not concentrated as much upon the finding of new facts as upon throwing new light on already existing material. I have written this thesis in an endeavour to discover trends and movements, not primarily to discuss the actual political history of the period. In this I agree with Professor Geoffrey Barraclough, who wrote in the Times Literary Supplement of January 6, 1956: "What is required, in short, is not so much new knowledge as a new vision, playing on old facts." History, Professor Barraclough goes on to say, is not solely "knowledge [gained] by meticulous research but contributions to understanding."

The major emphasis in such a work is of necessity on national and domestic politics, for the trends in a party's history are bound to express themselves nationally, but I have tried not to neglect local politics and foreign affairs. I have also tried to restrict the bibliography to works of

actual use, and not to include every work consulted, whether useful or not. In the quotations used herein all emphasis is in the original unless otherwise stated. In this period direct quotation was often given in the third person; where this is the case I have not changed the original.

I have received invaluable help and encouragement from many sources. My supervisor at the London School of Economics, Mr. Richard Greaves, has been of great assistance at every stage of this study; so too has Mr. John Parker, M.P., who has read the manuscript of the work and offered valuable suggestions. Other members of the teaching staff of the London School of Economics who have helped me include Mr. R. T. McKenzie and Mr. Richard Pear. I have also benefited greatly from discussions with my contemporaries at the L.S.E., both undergraduate and post-graduate. I wish to thank Sir Charles Trevelyan for the letter cited in Appendix III and the following for valuable interviews: Mrs. Margaret Cole, Viscount Samuel, Dr. Gilbert Murray, O.M., and Lord Russell, O.M. I am also deeply indebted to the staffs of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, the Library of the Liberal Party, the library of the National Liberal Club, the Institute of Historical Research and the University of London Library at Senate House. They have laboured to procure material for me, most kindly and willingly, sometimes at considerable difficulty to themselves. The aid which I have received in writing

this thesis has thus been great; its opinions and conclusions, of course, are entirely my own.

B. David Rubinstein

CHAPTER 1

IN RETROSPECT

The most striking political phenomenon in Great Britain in the twenty years after 1880 was the decline of the Liberal Party and the two necessary concomitants of a rising labour movement and a strengthened Conservative Party. Given the apparent predominance of Liberalism in mid-Victorian Britain, this sudden decline - stopped only temporarily by the fortuitous General Election of 1906 - seems inexplicable. In fact, however, the Liberal predominance was far more apparent than real, and was in any case fragile and brief. To understand the Liberal Party as it existed in 1880 it is necessary to appreciate the ideological conceptions and the material interests on which it was based, the mixture of lofty and sordid motives which underlay it. Political parties are rarely founded on specific theoretical principles; this is usually inevitable, for rigid adherence to a narrow orthodoxy often prevents a party's ability to respond to the felt needs of a given age. More than most parties, however, the Liberal Party was at all times of its brief existence a coalition, a collection of separate, conflicting forces which made its life hectic, feverish and short. As we shall see shortly, the party was not properly constituted until after Palmerston's death in 1865, and it is indisputable that its effective existence came to an end when the lights went out all over Europe in 1914. Even during its fifty-year

lifetime the Liberal Party was in office less than half the time, and the years of office were as notable for Liberal dissensions as they were for the reforms which were enacted.

The origins of the Liberal Party lie, of course, further back in history than the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when "Whigs" and "Tories" first became clear, conflicting groups. The more immediate origins of the party of 1880, however, lay in the events which had taken place since 1830, when a Whig Government under Lord Grey had taken office after a long spell in the wilderness. That Government achieved fame by passing the Reform Bill of 1832 and other legislation - the new Poor Law, the first effective Factory Act, and the Municipal Corporations Act. Despite this display of reforming zeal, however, the Grey Ministry was anything but eager for change; the Ministry was almost entirely Whig in complexion and enacted the Reform Bill largely because of its commitments and because of the furore "out-of-doors" which was skilfully and successfully led by agitators like Francis Place and Thomas Attwood. For the Whigs, despite their traditions of belief in freedom, despised the mass of people and were almost as opposed to reforms as the Tories, and in the thirty-odd years after the Reform Bill were able successfully to halt any drastic reforms which Radicals might wish. Motions for a ballot, shorter Parliaments, and household suffrage, for example, proposed by Radicals as early as the Melbourne Government of 1835, were unhesitatingly

and overwhelmingly defeated. Hazlitt, the great essayist, wrote in the 'thirties that the Tories wished "to have things exactly as they are," while the Whigs "watched the slow, gradual, reluctant growth of Liberal views, and, smiling, saw the aloe of Reform blossom at the end of a hundred years".[1] The Whig leaders were in the main members of old landed families, of the titled nobility stretching back hundreds of years; they consistently lacked the opportunistic ability of the Tories to admit to leadership talented outsiders, such as Sir Robert Peel and Benjamin Disraeli. In the Whig Governments between 1832 and 1865 we find the predominance of names like Grey, Melbourne, Palmerston, Russell, Landsdowne, Clarendon, Argyll, Granville, and Newcastle; although these eminent Whigs could not prevail in all cases, they had far more power and authority than had the disparate, disorganised Radicals who numbered between 50 and 150 in these decades. Later, the Whig aristocracy was reinforced by a middle-class Whiggery, including Goschen, Lowe, and others, which would, as we shall see, be of great significance when the full effects of the enfranchisement of 1832 were at last felt. Generally speaking, the Whigs' idea of progress consisted of

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1. Fyfe, Hamilton: The British Liberal Party, London, 1928, p. 24.

resisting all change until it became inevitable, and then to gain credit for enacting needed reforms. There were Radical-Whigs, such as [in very different ways] Lord John Russell and Sir William Harcourt, but though these men were willing to accept and even promote reforms in certain instances and at certain times, they were highly atypical of Whiggery. More usual to Whigs were vague inclinations to accept mild political measures and to show a certain friendliness towards Nonconformists. Typically, Palmerston, the arch Whig, declared: "What every man, and woman too, has a right to is to be well governed under just laws . . . . We live under a monarchy, therefore we should not run wild after institutions and arrangements which essentially belong to that unhappy system of social organisation called a Republic".[1] John Arthur Roebuck, the Radical M.P., described the Whigs in 1852: "The Whigs have ever been an exclusive and aristocratic faction, though at times employing democratic principles and phrases as weapons of defence against their opponents . . . . When out of office they are demagogues; in power they become exclusive oligarchs".[2]

Although the Whigs held supremacy in the party which was sometimes called Whig, sometimes Whig-Liberal, and occasionally, though increasingly, Liberal, the Radicals

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1. _Ibid._, p. 38.

2. Briggs, Asa: _Victorian People_, London, 1954, p. 73

were at most times a strong and vociferous group, in and out of the House of Commons. Throughout the 1832-1865 period they agitated for more reform, the secret ballot, reform of the land laws, freer trade, education for the masses, Church disestablishment, and the other political reforms which were to be enacted largely by the efforts of the Gladstonian Liberal Party. The Radicals suffered, however, not only from their small numbers, which a united and determined stand could have done much to overcome. They suffered far more from the fact that they were not a coherent whole. There were Benthamites, philosophical Radicals, Manchester School Radicals, Tory Radicals, and others; the separate philosophic bases meant separate political action. Most of the Radicals were professional or business men, believers in the "economic laws" which prevented, as they thought, effective state interference with the workings of the economic system. This meant that they were entirely unresponsive to the distress of the masses of the nation, a distress which culminated in the Chartist movement of the later 'thirties and 'forties. In 1839, one of the years of climax for the movement, Attwood moved that the House go into Committee to consider the Chartist petition; his motion roused but 46 votes against 235. John Bright, whose rise to public eminence came through the strength of the Lancashire cotton mills, was for over thirty years one of the foremost Radical leaders; yet

he could state: "All legislative interference with the labour market, all attempts of Government to fix the wages of industry, all interferences of a third party between employers and employed, are unjustifiable in principle and mischievous in their results."[1] Speaking of a proposed Factory Act in 1865, Bright said: "If this machinery Bill passes, I have advised my partners to set the example of turning the keys in our mills and to throw upon the legislators the responsibility of feeding the millions whom they will not allow us to employ at a profit."[2] Thus the economic interests of the most powerful group of Radicals combined with their philosophic beliefs to render them unsympathetic to working-class demands; Sir Henry Slesser points out truly: "From the point of view of the condition of the great number of the workers, it mattered not whether the Radicals were powerful or weak; their best friends in practical affairs had been Tories such as Ashley, Sadler, and Disraeli."[3] When it came to resisting the Poor Law, enacting Factory legislation and so forth, Tory Radicals (Richard Oastler was another prominent example) were far more reliable than Benthamites or

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1. _Ibid._, pp. 220 - 1.

2. Slesser, [Sir] Henry: _A History of the Liberal Party_, London, 1943, p. 80.

3. _Ibid._, p. 79.

representatives of the Manchester School. John Fielden was almost the only prominent non-Tory Radical to champion social legislation in Parliament. Ashley [later Lord Shaftesbury] wrote in his diary: "Bright was ever my most malignant opponent, Cobden bitterly hostile."[1]

The Crimean War also divided Radicals; the peace group, led by Bright and Cobden, was strongly opposed by the patriot Radicals, prominent among whom were Roebuck and Layard. The Whig and Tory politicians skilfully played off one group against the other, to their own advantage. Lord Durham, the "Radical Jack" who was popular and who seemed likely to become a future Radical Prime Minister, died an untimely death in 1840. Moreover, shortly after the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had given a fillip to Radical fortunes, the country settled down to a profound political apathy, particularly noticeable after the last great Chartist manifestation in 1848. Although the Radicals had a representative in the 1852-5 Coalition Government in Molesworth, his efforts for reforms were continually blocked by the Peelite and Whig majority. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that little effective legislation came from the Radical efforts (though several Reform Bills were introduced by Whigs, Radicals, and Tories between 1852 and

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1. _Ibid._, p. 79.

1865) and that in 1858 two important, lasting measures of reform were enacted by a Tory Government - Jewish Emancipation and repeal of the laws which made ownership of real property obligatory upon Members of Parliament. This situation was made worse by the fact that many of the eminent Radicals were as aristocratic in their connections as the Whigs. With Cobden and Bright there came the first powerful influx of Radical businessmen into the House of Commons, but after 1832 there remained a considerable number of rotten and pocket boroughs which bred "statesmen" by allowing certain favoured men to be returned to the House of Commons at an early age. Needless to say, they bred corruption as well. In 1865, for instance, George Otto Trevelyan, a pronounced Radical (who died as late as 1928), was returned for the pocket borough of Tynemouth at the age of 27. Just before the election the Radical candidate bought the estate of Chirton for £61,000, in order to buy the votes of the tenants who always voted as their landlord directed. G. M. Trevelyan, his son, comments: "It was sold again after the election, having served its purpose . . . . The fact that my father, of all people, first entered Parliament by such a road as the Chirton estate, indicates . . . what were the limits of the electoral reform that had been effected in 1832."[1]

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1. Trevelyan, G. M.: <u>Sir George Otto Trevelyan</u>, London, 1932, p. 72.

The long ascendancy of Palmerston began in 1855 and ended only with his death in 1865. Radicals, more moderate Liberals and Tories butted their heads in vain against the success of a man who might be defeated often enough in the House of Commons, but who retained an unshakeable popularity in the country. This popularity was demonstrated strikingly in 1857 over the China war, and again in 1859 when a General Election returned a Palmerstonian majority after the House of Commons had opposed his stand on the Orsini affair in France. Through these ten years foreign affairs were of far more importance in the eyes of the politically conscious than domestic; "Pam" and his jingoist adventures held the popular attention along with the Italian war of independence (towards which the Government maintained a benevolent neutrality along with hostility to the schemes of Napoleon III), and the American Civil War. In the last-named the Government did not interfere, although Tory and Whig opinion was overwhelmingly on the side of the slave States. The Marquis of Hartington, scion of the house of Cavendish, wrote to his father early in 1863 from New York: "I am decidedly Southern in the main, and, from what I see, that would not at all suit my constituents. How they can be so idiotic as to admire Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation, and how they can talk such nonsense as they do about emancipation I cannot understand, and I shall have to tell

them so."[1] On the other side, the Radicals, led by John Bright, whipped up much working-class sentiment in favour of the North, which was a land after Bright's own heart - dominated by a business class and free. In 1863 in a typical panegyric on the North, diametrically opposed to the expressions of Palmerston and Hartington, Bright declared that the United States was "happy and prosperous without emperor - without king - without the surroundings of a Court - without nobles except such as are made by eminence in intellect and virtue - without State bishops and State priests, those vendors of the Love that works salvation - without great armies and great navies[2] - without a great debt and great taxes."[3]

But aside from the controversies of foreign adventures and concerns, little public agitation took place during the "reign of Palmerston". Gladstone, at the time Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote to Sir James Graham late in 1860: "We live now in anti-reforming times. All improvements have to be urged in apologetic, almost in supplicatory tones. I sometimes reflect how much less Liberal, as to domestic policy, is this Government than Sir Robert Peel's, and how much the tone of ultra-Toryism prevails among a large portion of the Liberal Party."[4] Four years later when Garibaldi, wildly

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1. Holland, Bernard: Life of Devonshire, vol. 1, London, 1911, p. 53.

2. This was a curious remark to make of a nation engaged in the greatest war then known to mankind.

3. Fyfe, op. cit., p. 40.

4. Holland, op. cit., p. 64.

greeted by the population was visiting London, Cobden wrote in a letter: "When will the masses of this country begin to think of home politics? Our friend Bright observed, as he gazed from a window in Parliament Street on the tens of thousands that cheered the Italian: 'If the people would only make a few such demonstrations for themselves, we could do something for them.' But nothing except foreign politics seems to occupy the attention of the people, press or parliament."[1]

But slowly this situation was changing, as the reforming zeal which had been expended in the 'thirties and in the Chartist movement took renewed life; after slumbering for so long, Radicalism was now, as the late 'sixties approached, stronger than ever before. The re-appearance of Reform as a lively and strong force was aided by two personal factors; the death in 1865 of Palmerston, and the emergence of a Liberal Party led by William Ewart Gladstone.

Gladstone had been, Macaulay had said at the outset of his career, "the rising hope of those stern and unbending Tories", yet he grew with the years so that long before his old age he was venerated by Radicals and working-men. For many years after 1846 Gladstone had been a Peelite, content with neither Whig nor Tory, but his free-trading views, his dislike of Disraeli and his sympathy with the cause of a free

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1. Maccoby, Simon: <u>English Radicalism, 1853 - 1886</u>, London, 1938, p. 79.

Italy all inclined him towards the Whigs and Liberals, and in 1859 he joined Palmerston's Government as Chancellor of the Exchequer. In this position he fast gained the reputation of being a Radical, helped by his successful defiance of the House of Lords over the repeal of the Paper Tax and his great free-trading Budget of 1860. His Whig colleagues bore a wary eye on the quondam Tory; the Earl of Clarendon, for example, wrote in 1861 that Oxford, Gladstone's constituency, "is always more or less of a check upon the great power for mischief he possesses."[1] The notorious blunder over the American Civil War notwithstanding, Gladstone's popularity in the country grew apace. Palmerston wrote: "Gladstone will soon have it all his own way. Whenever he gets my place we shall have some strange doings." This apprehension was deepened by a speech of Gladstone's which, Morley said, "suddenly electrified the political world." Speaking in May, 1864, on Reform, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said: "I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger, is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution."[2] In speaking Gladstone was always inclined towards verbosity

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1. Manchester Guardian, February 18, 1956, p. 6.

2. Morley, John [Lord]: Life of Gladstone, vol. 2, London, 1903, p. 126.

and over-subtlety; what he had intended to be innocuous shocked his colleagues and overjoyed the Radicals, while Disraeli, on the other side, said that his rival was reviving the doctrines of Tom Paine. Seriously perturbed, Palmerston sent a strong reprimand and, not satisfied by the reply, wrote again. "I can assure you that I hear from many quarters the unfavourable impression it [i.e., the speech] has produced even upon many of the Liberal Party, and upon all persons who value the maintenance of our institutions."[1]

Gladstone's popularity now soared even higher, and in the 1865 Election he was in large areas of the country the key figure of the contest. A factor making him far more acceptable to Radicals was the loss of his Oxford seat; now Gladstone was "unmuzzled". A Whig-Liberal-Radical majority was returned, and when shortly afterwards Palmerston died and Lord Russell became Prime Minister it was generally recognised that an age had passed. Reform could no longer be prevented and would gather force. G. M. Trevelyan writes that "Bright loomed large, as the monstrous crow overshadowing all that gay Society of the privileged."[2] Together, Bright and Gladstone led the fight for Reform which ended in the 1867 Act. Though he emphatically stated: "I do not pretend

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

2. Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

myself to be a democrat. I never accepted that title . . ."[1] Bright aroused public feeling after Gladstone's Bill had been rejected by a Whig "cave" in 1866 and succeeded in exciting huge demonstrations and marches in favour of Reform in London and the provinces. Birmingham, then as before and afterwards the leader in the Reform movement, was specially notable for its display of feeling. The climax was reached in Disraeli's Reform Act of 1867, which was more far-reaching than either Whigs or Tories had wished.

In the 'sixties, then, the Liberal Party was gradually being formed. As early as 1861, W. E. Forster, then a Radical, felt [as he wrote later to his wife]: "The want of the Liberal Party of a new man was great, and felt to be great; the old Whig leaders were worn out; there were no new Whigs; Cobden and Bright were impracticable and un-English, and there were hardly any hopeful Radicals. There was a great prize of power and influence to be aimed at."[2]

But the path to the leadership of a successful Liberal Party was not one which was easily trod. Even the mild Reform Bill of Gladstone's in 1866 had aroused Whig disapproval led by Robert Lowe, an intellectual who frankly scorned his "social inferiors". Leading the opposition to the Reform Bill [an opposition which Bright styled the "Cave of Adullam"

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1. Briggs, op. cit., p. 211.

2. Morley, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 123.

and which achieved fame as the "Adullamites"7 Lowe asked: "If you want venality, ignorance, drunkenness - if you want impulsive, unreflecting, violent people - where do you look for them? Do you go to the top or the bottom?"[1] Significantly, Lowe lamented the change which had so recently occurred: "Sir, it seems to me we have more and more reason every day we live to regret the death of Lord Palmerston. The remaining members of his Government would seem, by way of a mortuary contribution, to have buried in his grave all their prudence, statesmanship, and moderation."[2] Lowe was one of those who felt the existing Constitution to be one of perfect balance between the different classes and "orders" of society and who dreaded change as leading to chaos. Over forty Whigs agreed with him and voted against the 1866 Bill.

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In 1868 the newly-enfranchised town voters showed little gratitude to Disraeli and returned the Liberal Party to office with a majority of 112; Lord Russell having retired some time before, Gladstone became Prime Minister. As past history would give reason to expect, the new Government was a strange coalition. It contained both Lowe and Bright, the bitter enemies of but two years before. Only nine Commoners were

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1. Ibid., p. 202.

2. Briggs, op. cit., p. 243.

appointed to the Cabinet as against six peers, and the whole group had a distinctly Whiggish complexion, Bright being the only pronounced Radical. Some Radicals were in the Government in non-Cabinet positions and more in Parliament, but the young Sir Charles Dilke, a Radical though a landowner and returned for the first time, commented in his diary: "The Liberal Party is more even in opinion than ever before. No Adullamites, no Radicals but myself. The Cabinet is somewhat behind the party, which is bad. Too many peers."[1]

Gladstone as Prime Minister was the only man who could possibly have kept the party together, even though there had been a feeble Whig cabal to keep him out.[2] His High Anglicanism and deference to Crown and peerage offended the Radicals, who were largely Nonconformist and opposed to the aristocracy. The Liberation Society, for example, was a strongly Nonconformist and Radical organisation and exerted very strong pressure on the mid-Victorian Liberal Party. On the other hand, his liability to violent passions, zeal for free trade and political reforms were equally obnoxious to the large Whig element. In economic matters, however, Gladstone was an advocate of laissez-faire, with an ardour and vehemence worthy of an classical economist. He was, of course, a professional politician, and was forced, as we shall

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1. Gwynn, Stephen, and Tuckwell, Gertrude: Life of Dilke, vol. 1, London, 1917, p. 80.

2. See Holland, vol. 1, p. 70.

see, increasingly to temper pure economic ideology with political expediency. But at heart Gladstone believed deeply in freedom for the individual to shape his own ends unencumbered by the action of the state. In his enthusiasm for self-realisation he was impervious to the need for state action to redress the balance between the privileged and the poor.[1] Years later, his son wrote: "To bring in the state between employers and employed was [to Gladstone] an interference which sapped the foundations of the whole structure."[2] Situated, in 1868, on the Left of the Liberal Party but not the far Left, Gladstone was the ideal leader if any man could have been. For over twenty-five years the force of his personality and his convictions were to keep in uneasy unity the larger part of the Liberal Party.

The Ministry of 1868-1874, commonly known as Gladstone's "Great" Ministry, is remembered for its brilliant record of political reforms, including the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, an Irish Land Act, the Ballot, the Education Act of 1870, abolition of Army Purchase, the Judicature Act, the settlement of the _Alabama_ claims, and others. Yet almost every one of these measures caused antagonism and division among Liberals. Morley wrote: "As time went on, the essentially composite character of the majority that was only

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1. See Appendix IV.

2. Gladstone, Herbert [Lord]: _After Thirty Years_, London, 1928, p. 89.

held together by the force of Mr. Gladstone's personality, his authority in the House, and his enormous strength outside, revealed itself in awkward fissions."[1] The most important example, of course, was the division over the Education Act. Forster brought in a measure which set up local board schools, but which added further funds and stature to the grants to Church Schools already being given. The Radical element, so largely Nonconformist, united to oppose the aggrandisement of the Church and in defence of secular education. In Birmingham the National Education League was set up, under the powerful leadership of [among others] Joseph Chamberlain, not yet 35 and now coming into national prominence for the first time. Chamberlain's formula, assiduously followed and preached by the League, was that Schools should be "universal, compulsory, unsectarian, and free."[2] Chamberlain led a deputation to Downing Street, but the Prime Minister refused to accede to most of its requests. In Parliament between 60 and 130 Liberals voted against various parts of the Bill, which was carried largely with Opposition support; in one division, for example, a motion to oppose denominational education in board schools was defeated by 251 to 130; significantly, Gladstone wrote: "The minority was Liberal, but

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1. Morley, vol. 2, p. 388.

2. Garvin, J.L.: Life of Chamberlain, vol. 1, London, 1932, p. 104.

more than half of the Liberal Party voted in the majority."[1] Only a few of the Radical demands were finally adopted; the motion just mentioned was one of them. The agitation of Radicals and Nonconformists against the Education Bill did not cease with its enaction into law; the campaign for amendment centred around Clause 25, which gave to local authorities power to pay out of the rates the fees of very poor children at _any_ school, denominational or otherwise. In 1872 a great meeting of representatives of over 800 Nonconformist churches met at Manchester to send a protest to the Prime Minister. In the 1874 election over 200 of the 425 Liberal candidates were pledged to the repeal of Clause 25.

But the Education Act, if the most important, was not the only cause of the divisions which led to resounding defeat of the Liberal Party in 1874. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1871, passed after considerable trade union pressure, confined union liberties almost as much as it extended them. A group of Liberal M.P.'s, including Harcourt, Rathbone, Mundella and Sir Henry James tried to amend the Act in a sense favourable to the unions, but without success. Gardiner writes of the Irish Land Bill of 1870 that Gladstone "was assailed on all sides by actual hostility or competitive proposals. The Duke of Argyll was actively opposed to the scheme. Bright was urging a project of purchase by State aid; Chichester Fortescue, the Irish Chief Secretary, was

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1. Morley, vol. 2, p. 304.

insisting that more than compensation to tenants for improvements was needed to settle the Irish land laws, and Clarendon was writing to Granville predicting the imminent break-up of the Government."[1] A Licensing Act aroused much opposition among both the working classes and the brewery interests,[2] and the abolition of Army Purchase excited Whig discontent, particularly as the disapproval of the House of Lords was circumvented by Royal Warrant. Radicals were becoming increasingly independent; in 1874, for example, Dilke said that since the Education Act he had "ceased to be a steady supporter of the Government."[3] Radical motions for Payment of Members, Women's suffrage, land law changes, and other reforms were opposed and defeated by the Government with consequent Radical indignation. Gladstone was deeply perturbed by what he called Liberal "disloyalty"; at the end of 1873 he wrote: "Divisions in the Liberal Party are to be seriously apprehended from a factious spirit on questions of economy, on questions of education in relation to religion, on further parliamentary change, on the Land Laws. On these questions generally my sympathies are with what may be termed the advanced party, whom on other and general grounds I will never head nor lead."[4] Finally it was decided that the time

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1. Gardiner, A.G.: Life of Harcourt, vol. 1, London, 1923, p. 214.

2. After the election of 1874, Gladstone said: "We have been borne down in a torrent of gin and beer."

3. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 169.

4. Morley, vol. 2, p. 457.

for electoral decision had at last arrived; Government prestige had been sinking ever lower and reached its nadir with the disastrous Irish University Bill in 1873; Parliament was dissolved in January, 1874, and a sweeping Conservative victory followed [Gladstone had offered the country no programme except retrenchment and a lower income tax]. Liberal victory could hardly have been anticipated after a loss of 20 by-elections in the past three sessions in contests which often witnessed more than one Liberal candidate; this situation was climaxed by a by-election at Greenwich in August, 1873, at which six candidates were nominated, five of them Liberals! The Conservative of course won, and even had an absolute majority over the combined totals of all his opponents.

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After the election of 1874 it was evident to many observers that a new situation had arisen in British politics. For one thing, the forces making for the Liberal decline were strengthened by the "Great Depression", beginning towards the end of the "Great" Ministry, in 1873. Liberalism before the advent of the Depression was suffused with a rosy optimism which concurred with Samuel Smiles' praises of "Self-Help", and which did not realise that it is much easier to help oneself if one is an employer or landowner than if one is an unemployed labourer. If all was not already for the best, the typical Liberal mid-Victorian felt, in the best of all possible worlds, the millenium was at any rate not far off. And in a nation

where world wars were only distant and horrible figments of twisted imaginations, where Britain's economic supremacy was taken for granted, this attitude was perhaps rather more understandable than it would be today. But then a change occurred. Much controversy has been raised about the Great Depressions as an economic phenomenon which it is unnecessary to discuss here at length. Suffice it to say that Britain sustained an economic reverse which arrested the amazing industrial growth which had been so marked a development of the British economy since approximately the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Speaking very roughly, the third quarter of the nineteenth century was characterised by an unparalleled economic advance; the score of years after 1875, on the other hand, was another matter. Trade unions after a prosperous period in the early 1870's suffered a sharp drop in their militancy and membership, most notably in the case of Joseph Arch's agricultural labourers' union. Agriculture in general suffered severely, for bad weather, insects and diseases, new inventions like refrigeration and a simultaneous increase in grain imports from North America, made more serious by British adherence to Free Trade, caused a sharp drop in agricultural production. Falling prices and a drop in foreign investment characterised these twenty years, and foreign tariffs and industrial growth abroad hampered British exports. Unemployment was heavy during the later 'seventies and was to be so again in the mid-'eighties and early 'nineties. Heavy basic

industries like iron and steel, foundry work and shipbuilding also suffered.

Thus the weight of the Great Depression grew with the years, and was to be a severe blow to Liberal conceptions like classical economics, to the self-confidence of Liberal politicians, and to the attitudes of Liberal businessmen towards labour common in the days of Mrs. Webb's youth. Later she wrote, revealingly: "With the word labour I was, of course, familiar. Coupled mysteriously with its mate capital, this abstract term was always turning up in my father's conversation, and it occurred and reoccurred in the technical journals and reports of companies which lay on the library table. 'Water plentiful and labour docile' 'The wages of labour are falling to their natural level . . . .' The allusion to water and its ways gave a queer physic-mechanical twist to my conception of the labouring classes . . . . Indeed, I never visualised labour as separate men and women of different sorts and kinds. Right down to the time when I became interested in social science . . . labour was an abstraction, which seemed to denote an arithmetically calculable mass of human beings, each individual a repetition of the other."[1] Such attitudes were no longer possible when the full effects of

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1. Webb, Beatrice: My Apprenticeship, Penguin Edition, Harmondsworth, 1938, pp. 60-61.

the Great Depression were felt, and the repercussions on the Liberal Party were, as we shall see more fully later, severe.

Moreover, Radicalism by 1874 was no longer under the leadership of John Bright; it was now much further to the Left on both political and economic grounds. In the early 'seventies Sir Charles Dilke had become notorious by a campaign for a philosophic Republicanism which aroused working-class sentiment as did Charles Bradlaugh's Republican and Secularist campaign. John Morley was a leader among those who campaigned for a national secular system of education and for disestablishment of the Church of England. Other Radical leaders included A. J. Mundella and Jesse Collings. But the question which was arousing most Radicals was the land question, and inspired by a hatred of the landed aristocracy they partially deserted economic liberalism to campaign for dispersal of land ownership, reform of land tenure and protection of the small owner. Cobden was emphatic in his advocacy of small landholdings, and early in 1870 John Stuart Mill had organised the Land Tenure Reform Association, along with other Radicals including Thorold Rogers, Professor Cairnes, Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Fawcett, John Morley, and, somewhat surprisingly, six members of the Marxian First International, which had been founded in London six years before. The problem of Irish land further justified in Radical eyes a departure from the strictures of classical economics. The large amount of the country's land which

rested in so few hands made the agitation a natural one for Radicals to undertake.

The most notable of the new Radicals, however, was Joseph Chamberlain, whose leap to national fame in 1870 had been successfully sustained in following years. In the decade of the 'seventies Chamberlain was to be the originator and propagator of a new Radicalism, best described as Social Radicalism, for it was in many ways basically different from that of the laissez-faire Radicals led by Bright. Henry Fawcett, for example, politically a strong Radical, opposed the social-reforming legislation of the Disraeli Government after 1874, but Chamberlain and his followers emphatically supported it. It was notable that the Conservatives made a fine record in social legislation, particularly in relation to housing, trade unions and public health, and that the Liberal Governments which preceded and followed could offer very little legislation along similar lines. The anti-social legislation tradition of Whigs and the old Radicals remained very strong, and the Social Radicals had thus a force of great strength to combat. Unlike Bright, moreover, Chamberlain openly declared himself a democrat and gloried in the still somewhat scandalous title. Chamberlain had built up a large fortune from manufacturing, and adopted policies which in ways sprang from his business practices - belief in municipal monopoly, efficiency and opposition to "economic laws". As early as 1870, the Birmingham Radical on speech-

making tours deplored the low level of agricultural wages and in 1872 he proclaimed a programme of County Franchise, Free Land, Free Schools, Free Church, and the Free Breakfast Table. In September, 1873, a leading article appeared by him in Morley's Fortnightly Review, which caused a scandal in the political world due to the vigour of his attack upon the Liberal Government. He wrote that "the unexampled commercial prosperity of the last few years has led many to lose sight of the coexisting misery and discontent of a large portion of the population . . . whose homes would disgrace a barbarous country."[1] Chamberlain attacked the hesitance of the Government: "On all the great questions of the day the Ministry is inarticulate or indefinite,"[2] and said that the Government "listens to the cynical criticism of the upper and well-to-do classes, who have never yet exhibited any especial eagerness for change, and it is deaf to the growing desire for radical reform which occupies the minds of the great mass of the people, upon whom it ought chiefly to lean for support."[3] Chamberlain wrote that the trade unions must be strengthened and that the Act of 1871 which imposed such severe restrictions must be amended so as to be more favourable to the unions. The 1871 Act, he declared, "is covertly intended to keep labour at the

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 159.

2. Fortnightly Review, September, 1873, pp. 292-3.

3. Ibid., p. 291.

feet of capital."[1] Chamberlain's remedies were not so drastic as his attack, but they included abolition of the confining land laws, aid to tenants, disestablishment of State Churches, and free schools. This programme achieved fame as "Free Church, Free Schools, Free Land, and Free Labour." Other articles appeared, and Chamberlain showed his sincerity and ability by three highly successful years as Mayor of Birmingham /1873-1876/. As Mayor he won a celebrated name as one of the originators of "municipal socialism", by taking over for the city its water supply, transport, and other public utilities, and by the use of high taxation producing a maximum of civic well-being. The Birmingham watchword was "high rates and a healthy city"; it was both effective and popular.

Radical as Chamberlain was, however, he was not a Socialist in any sense. G. D. H. Cole calls him "a Radical with certain collectivist tendencies . . . . His favoured land reform was peasant proprietorship, and he believed firmly in the type of private enterprise by which his own fortune had been made."[2] Nor was Dilke, who drew close to Chamberlain in the years preceding and following 1874, a Socialist. As we shall see, a large part of the motive force of Social Radicalism came from a hatred of feudalism, of the landed

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1. Ibid., pp. 291-2

2. Cole, G.D.H.: British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914, London, 1941, p. 81.

proprietors and the House of Lords, and they did not oppose the drive for economy favoured by the Bright Radicals. T. L. Oxley wrote in a contemporary pamphlet: "Commerce and manufacturers have evoked a Bourgeoisie - rich, influential, and intelligent . . . . It is in this class that English Radicalism had its origins and has its growth." What was taking place, Oxley wrote was "a veritable commencement of a campaign of the English bourgeoisie against a privileged class whose rights they covet."[1]

Nonetheless, the new Social Radicalism was as left-wing as the times would permit. The quiescence of the working-classes after 1873 and their acceptance of the prevailing economic shibboleths, combined with the loss of militancy brought by the Great Depression, made impossible in the later 'seventies or early 'eighties the growth of an organised Socialist movement. Social Radicalism was a new phenomenon and the more frightening inasmuch as it was led by those very classes whose energy and Radicalism had presumably been led and expended by Bright and Cobden. It was a renewed attack upon the ascendancy of the Whig landed families in the Liberal Party, an ascendancy which could plainly no longer continue as the country moved towards democratic institutions. Privilege and ancestry had easily retained the lead until Palmerston's death, but that lead

1. Oxley, T. L.: Radicalism: its Effects on the English Constitution, London, 1880, pp. 14-15.

was bound to crumble under the attack of men like the Social Radical leaders, men who condemned the Whigs as Dilke condemned Hartington, as "infected with moral indifferentism".[1]

In leading the drive after 1874 to renovate the Liberal Party and to transform it, the Social Radicals lacked the prescience of some of those very Whigs whom they were combating; their very Radicalism was to lead to measures and movements of a far more drastic nature than their own proposals. In reality, the Whigs and even the "Adullamites" were the most far-seeing politicians of their day, for they knew where they wanted Reform to stop and predicted the consequences to their party and class of continued Radical agitation. Thus Sir William Harcourt, in one of his Whig phases, wrote in 1856 of Bright's attacks upon the aristocracy: "Socialism is the legitimate and inevitable corollary of Mr. Bright's doctrine. If want is the crime of the Government, then the duty of the Government must be to provide against want . . . . Mr. Bright may pretend to direct his attacks against the aristocracy alone, but it is the possessors of capital, the employers of labour, the great middle classes of the country who have real cause to dread his revolutionary language."[2] Even more strikingly, the Adullamite leader Robert Lowe [whose famous phrase actually spoke of the

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1. Fyfe, p. 76.

2. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 90.

necessity "to compel our future masters to learn their letters",[1] and who wanted no further mass education beyond letter-learning7 predicted the future in the 1866 debates on Reform. "Nothing is so remarkable among the working classes of England," Lowe declared, "as their intense tendency to associate and organise themselves . . . . It is impossible to believe that the same machinery which is at present brought into play in connection with strikes would not be applied by the working classes to political purposes . . . . You know very well that they will soon possess the secret of their own power, and then what is to prevent them using it? . . . . They will say, 'We can do better for ourselves. Don't let us any longer be cajoled at elections. Let us set up shop for ourselves.'"[2] In 1867, after the passage of Disraeli's Reform Act, Lowe reiterated: "The more the Union spirit spreads the more it is likely to spread. It is a machine excellently qualified for political action, and we cannot doubt that the new Reform Bill will give an additional impulse to this species of association."[3]

It is almost certain that the great social transformation carried out in Great Britain in the past seventy-five years would not have been enacted peacefully without the ability and force of the Social Radicals, whose efforts were felt in many fields, not least in Trade Unionism; A. J. Mundella,

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1. Briggs, _op. cit._, p. 269.
2. _Ibid._, p. 260. See also Appendices IV and V.
3. _Ibid._, p. 261.

to cite one instance, was for years an adviser to the T. U. C. But the Whigs more accurately foresaw a future which would extinguish both the Social Radicals and themselves, and given their interests and convictions they were undoubtedly wise to resist change as they did.

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In 1874, then, the Liberal Party was seriously divided after the loss of the General Election. Gladstone retired soon after Parliament met, though he retained a nominal leadership until 1875. In a letter written to Granville in December, 1874, the ex-Prime Minister indicated a wish to retire and outlined a list of nine subjects which divided Liberals, including Reform and Redistribution, Church Disestablishment, Land Laws, Retrenchment, Imperialism, Reform of Local Government Taxation, Secular Education, undenominational Education, and Irish Affairs. Later, Dilke wrote of this period: "Mr. Gladstone was in the sulks, and Mr. Forster had been returned by Tory votes . . . . As though to strengthen the Conservative position we were at the same time on our side called upon to surrender our parliamentary liberties as independent members to a triumvirate, composed of Mr. Goschen, Lord Hartington, and Mr. Forster . . . ."[1] Harcourt wrote in December: "G. still sulks and says he will not lead. They go on begging him, but they have been so long like babies in leading strings that they cannot walk alone. In the

1. Gwynn and Tuckwell, vol. 1, p. 179.

meantime the disorganisation is complete. There is no whip, no office, no nothing."[1] A contest for the party leadership now followed, the battle being between the Marquis of Hartington, heir to the Duke of Devonshire, and Forster. The latter, who had been a Radical and was still much to the left of Hartington, might have been elected had not his candidacy divided the Radical votes. Dilke and Fawcett supported him, but the Nonconformists were still deeply antagonistic on grounds of the 1870 Education Act, and Chamberlain worked hard from outside Parliament to ensure Hartington's return. Harcourt, now recognised as a Liberal leader of the future, was strongly opposed to the possibility of Gladstone's return and worked for Hartington in the conviction that he could thus best achieve his end. At the same time he re-asserted his Whig principles after having been associated with the Radicals in the years of the "Great" Ministry. To a friend Harcourt wrote: "I am and always have been and always shall be a Whig, which I take to be the faith of all sensible Englishmen. The great vice of Gladstone is that he has never understood Whig principles and never will. If the Liberal Party is ever to be reconstituted it must be on that platform. If we can do nothing else we can at least prevent G. coming back with a motley crew of Home Rulers and Republicans, and I for one am much more content to bear

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1. Gardiner, vol. 1, p. 282.

the ills we have than fly to others which we know too well."[1]

Hartington, however, was not keen to assume the leadership of a divided party. Writing to Harcourt in January, 1875, he commented: "I do not myself feel certain that leadership of the opposition as a whole is either possible or desirable . . . . The opposition consists of Whigs, Radicals, and Home Rulers . . . .."[2] Harcourt wrote back, saying that in his opinion there were 70 Home Rulers, 70 Radicals, and "about 150 Whigs", and pointed out that the Whigs could lead the party only if they would seize the initiative. Unconvinced, however, Hartington wrote a revealing letter several days later to Lord Granville: "My suggestion to you was not exactly that we should do without a leader, but that the Whigs or Moderate Liberals should have one, the Radicals another, and the Irishmen a third. I think that there is hardly any important question on which the Whigs and Radicals will not vote against each other; Disestablishment, Household Suffrage in Counties, Education, Land Laws, etc.; and the position of a nominal leader seeing his flock all going their own way without attending to him, will not be comfortable."[3] Nevertheless, Forster declined to stand and Hartington was elected to five years of leadership of the character which he had foreseen; ineffective and uncomfortable. Fifty-eight of

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

2. Holland, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 141.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

the Irish withdrew into a Home Rule group led by the ageing Isaac Butts and renounced their nominal Liberal alliance. Soon afterwards, the signs of a far more irreconcilable Irish opposition to Liberalism were foreshadowed when Charles Stewart Parnell was returned in a by-election. Chamberlain, who lent a friendly ear to Irish demands, quickly noticed Parnell as a future leader of extremist claims.

The issues which divided the Liberal Party most under the Disraeli Government were the issues of foreign policy which rose to the fore after 1874. The Whigs favoured the purchase of the Khedive's Suez Canal shares; the Rothschilds, who were leading Whigs, possessed a considerable interest in British control in Egypt.[1] The Whigs also refused to object to Queen Victoria's assumption of the title of "Empress of India", in 1876, while Gladstone and the Radicals strongly opposed both these measures.

The greatest issue, however, was the one which was prominent before all others in 1876-1878, the Eastern Question. The Whigs retained their Palmerstonian predilections and endorsed a "patriot" foreign policy, while both Gladstone and the Radicals were strongly opposed to foreign adventures. Dilke, it is true, had written before his entry into Parliament _Greater Britain_, but his Imperialism has been overstressed; it was at all times mild, and in all

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1. See Gardiner, vol. 1, p. 312.

the great issues of his political career Dilke sided with the anti-Imperialist Radicals. Chamberlain, whose Imperialism was later to be so strong, was in these years a staunch believer in foreign retrenchment. Early in 1880, for example, he stated: "I say that our position is such, and the state of Europe is such, that we ought to concentrate our resources and limit, instead of extending, our responsibilities."[1] Quoting Sir William Molesworth he denounced the Government's South African policy as being "possessed with an insane desire for worthless empire."[2] Thus a conflict was bound to arise between Liberals when the Eastern Question rose to the fore. Disraeli cared little for the Bulgarian Christians who were being persecuted cruelly by Turkey, and was motivated by a strong distrust for Russian designs in the East. The Whigs felt generally the same, but the larger part of the Radicals vehemently opposed the Turkish bias of the Government. Their strongest spokesman was Gladstone, whose passion for liberty and justice were deeply aroused by the massacres in Bulgaria. Disregarding the nominal party leadership he launched a tremendous campaign against both the Government and Turkey, one climax of which was reached by the publication of his famous pamphlet on the "Bulgarian Horrors" in the autumn of 1876.

To Hartington and the Whigs this fierce display of anti-Turkish sentiment was as disagreeable and ill-timed as it

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1. Holland, vol. 1, p. 240.
2. Ibid., p. 239.

was gloriously welcome to the Radicals. Hartington traced the source of the cleavage to the fact that he had been a Palmerstonian and Gladstone a Peelite and that they had opposed each other's views as far back as the Crimean War. For a time the Liberal Party was divided into two, the Whigs opposing the Gladstonian policy almost as strongly as did the Conservatives. Hartington wrote: "I am afraid that the tendency of anything of this kind is to drive our best men, or at all events the Whigs, to the side of the Government. Something of this kind was the result of Gladstone's speeches . . . ."[1] In December, 1876, a National Conference, in which Gladstone partook, was called to protest against the tyrannous Turk; even more seriously perturbed, Hartington wrote to Granville, who acted as a liaison between him and Gladstone: "Gladstone might be supported in the country at a General Election, though I doubt it; but I feel certain that the Whigs and Moderate Liberals in the House are a good deal disgusted, and I am much afraid, that if he [I. e., Gladstone] goes on much further, nothing can prevent a break-up of the party."[2] Harcourt and Dilke somewhat reluctantly supported Gladstone, while Chamberlain and the mass of Radicals enthusiastically followed his lead; in October, 1876, Harcourt in a sentence to Dilke explained much of what

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1. ~~Holland~~ Ibid, p. 184.

2. Ibid., p. 186.

lay behind the conflict: "The Brooksite Whigs are furious with him, [again, Gladstone] and so are the commercial gents, whose pecuniary interests are extremely compromised."[1]

In April, 1877, Gladstone gave notice of five anti-Turk resolutions of an extreme nature which delighted the Tories and dismayed the Whigs, who opposed them. After much discussion, however, the ex-Prime Minister agreed to withdraw the three which were most seriously embarrassing to party unity, not without Radical displeasure. Granville wrote to him: "Some of the Radicals showed their cards - that it is not the Eastern Question, but the hopes of breaking up the party that really excites them."[2] On the other side a prominent Radical wrote: "Your goodness has been abused in the interests of a section of the party who deserve least at your hands. The current reports in the lobbies last night, spread by these gentlemen and easily believed by their friends, was that you had 'caved in'."[3]

After many anxious months the storm at last subsided after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, but the party split could not be disguised; it was, furthermore, far more serious than in the days of Palmerston and before, when parties had been coalitions in theory as well as in practice and when Governments looked

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1. Gardiner, vol. 1, p. 312.
2. Morley, vol. 2, p. 568.
3. Ibid., pp. 568-9.

to all sides for support as the occasion demanded. Perhaps the best indication of the dichotomy of views was expressed in speeches by Hartington and Gladstone after the Congress of Berlin in 1878; Hartington said: "I believe that if that policy was adopted by Her Majesty's Government, it was because they believed it was a policy not only in accordance with right and justice, but was also a policy demanded by the true and real interests of England. But though most of us approved the tendency of that policy, some of us thought it might have been worked out in a more active manner."[1] Gladstone declared shortly: "I know no chapter in our foreign policy so deplorable as that of the last eighteen months."[2] The division over the Eastern Question was repeated over other foreign and imperial issues, notably the Afghan War in 1878. Hartington's biographer comments that his "statesmanlike and reasonable treatment of the case deeply disappointed fiery Radicals and strong party men."[3] Radical resentment and the Whips' pressure caused the Whig leader to adopt a more hostile attitude towards the Government over the incident than in fact he felt. As late as January, 1880, the Economist, a Whiggish journal, wrote of Liberal attacks on the Government's foreign

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1. Holland, vol. 1, p. 197.
2. Ibid., p. 197.
3. Ibid., p. 234.

policy, and commented: "If this method of assault has the advantage of uniting and animating the great body of the opposition, it has undoubtedly the drawback of alienating certain sections of it . . . . We . . . say that there are some Liberals who are unable to associate themselves in all respects with the attacks of which the Government is the object . . . ."[1]

While foreign affairs most seriously divided the Liberal Government under the Beaconsfield [Disraeli had become ennobled in 1876] Government, signs were not wanting of domestic dissensions as well, dissensions which were in the long run to prove far more damaging to the party. The new and prominent force of Social Radicalism which had first attracted public notice in 1874 rose steadily in strength and popularity in the years which followed. The most notable sign of a new era was the emphasis on party organisation which now was felt. In London Dilke organised the Eleusis Club, strongly Radical and highly efficient. In Birmingham political organisation had been known even before Chamberlain's ascendancy to the position of mayor. The town was given three Parliamentary seats by the Reform Act of 1867 but each voter could vote only twice, a scheme devised in an effort to return one Conservative. An organisation was formed to defeat this scheme, and worked a "vote as you're told" system so capably that all three

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1. <u>Economist</u>, vol. 38, January 24, 1880, p. 86.

Liberal candidates in the Election of 1868 were returned by large majorities. After Chamberlain became Mayor the organisation increased both in numbers [including many working-class Radicals] and in efficiency, and efforts were made throughout the country to unite the various local associations into one national body. In 1877, to the dismay of Whigs, the feat was achieved; the local groups coalesced and formed the National Liberal Federation, in which Chamberlain and his devoted colleague Francis Schnadhorst were the key figures. It was only thinly disguised that the new organisation was Radical in tone; the pretence to include all Liberals was hardly meant and less successful. Chamberlain's biographer acknowledges: "He wanted the new instrument to put Radical pressure on his own leaders even more than to fight the Tories."[1] Immediately upon the formation of the Federation Chamberlain set out to procure Mr. Gladstone to pronounce his blessing. Granville anxiously wrote to him on May 21, 1877: "I presume that Chamberlain's object is not to reorganise the whole Liberal party, but to strengthen the young Liberal and more advanced portion of it, and to secure you, willing or unwilling, as leader."[2] This warning did not prevail with Gladstone, who

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1. Garvin, vol. 1, p. 258.

2. Maccoby, op. cit., p. 209.

was anxious to ensure continued support of his stand on the Eastern Question; he addressed the meeting on May 31, and declared in typical labyrinthian fashion before 30,000 people: "I rejoice, Sir . . . that the large audience here today of many hundreds of representatives of the constituencies of the country met together . . . to consider . . . and to join in council with you testifies to the disposition which exists to adopt this admirable principle of which you have given the example, and of which, if it be . . . freely and largely adopted, I for one, should be sufficiently sanguine to predict, with confidence, a success."[1] The National Liberal Federation was to attain great power under Chamberlain's leadership, and was at all times an important force of Social Radicalism within the party. It concentrated Radical demands and gave them voice in a way which no other section of the party could match. Moreover, in its early stages, it gave voice to working-class causes in Liberal circles, a striking precedent. Hartington was asked in 1878 by Chamberlain to address the first annual meeting in Leeds, but rather unwisely refused, saying that the organisation was of and for Radicals and not acceptable to the whole party. The Whigs naturally hated the "Caucus" [the name deriving from the somewhat disreputable American institution], rightly fearing that its discipline

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1. Watson, R. Spence: <u>The National Liberal Federation</u>, London, 1907, pp. 10-11.

and its Social Radicalism would drive them from their places of authority.

Chamberlain was returned to the House of Commons at an 1876 by-election, and once in Parliament joined with Dilke in a firm Radical alliance. Social Radicalism was not yet a creed with a variety of fixed proposals as it was to be by 1885, but the pair acted as a troublemaking force, proposing resolutions favouring more effective Ballot regulation, reform of the licensing laws, and various measures of social legislation. The most notable example of Radical intransigeance arose in 1879, when the Army Discipline Bill came before the House of Commons. The section pertaining to flogging was endorsed by Hartington, but Chamberlain, who had always had a strong dislike of flogging led a large "cave" of Radical and Irish members in opposition to it, in defiance of the party leadership. Somewhat injudiciously, Hartington disclaimed the responsibility of being Chamberlain's leader, and the Birmingham Radical instantly and fiercely replied, referring to Hartington as "lately the leader of the Liberal Party, but now of a section only." This incident, which ended in Radical triumph, and which Hartington called "the row with Chamberlain and the Radicals", was one of great significance. The other issue which had seriously divided the Liberal Party, the Eastern Question, was led from the intransigeant side by Gladstone, the party's late leader. This time the "cave" was led by an entirely new man, and

though the issue was not intrinsically a crucial one the circumstances were highly unusual. From this point forward Chamberlain was a marked man, the openly avowed antagonist of the older, conservative leaders. John Bright could be and had been "bought off" by the reforms of 1867-1874, but in Chamberlain, it seemed, there was a very different sort of man. His biographer points out: "The heavily aristocratic tone of Whig instruction would never again prevail in the Liberal Party."[1] Dilke wrote later of the incident: "When one went to the root of the matter, one saw that the whole difficulty sprang from the fact that the Whigs had no principles. Once upon a time they had principles, but their principles had been adopted by the other side, and long before 1879 their distinctive opinions had been taken from them. A party cannot be dignified and consistent if its chiefs and the mass of its rank and file have no principles."[2]

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As 1879 ended, then, the Liberal Party was seriously divided and was little stronger than the Government, which was reeling before reverses at home and abroad. Harcourt, significantly, wrote to Dilke late in 1879: "It is much easier to persuade the public that the Government are duffers than that we are conjurors. I shall therefore . . . be dull and

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1. Garvin, vol. 1, p. 271.

2. Gwynn and Tuckwell, vol. 1, p. 294.

safe."[1] The Party was divided into four sections: Whigs, Gladstonians, old Radicals who generally accepted Bright's laissez-faire principles, and Social Radicals under the lead of the "Caucus", Chamberlain and Dilke. At the year's end these groups imperceptibly shaded off into one another; Gladstone, for example, was close to Whigs on some issues and to Radicals on others. Despite their incompatible views, Gladstone and Chamberlain were equally looked to by many ordinary Liberals for leadership. On some issues the Bright Radicals were as advanced as the Social Radicals, on others [principally of economic policy] as conservative as the Whigs. But the divisions were present, and the incompatibilities were growing greater. At a meeting of Liberal leaders, excluding Gladstone, on December 16, 1879, it was decided not to ask the former leader to resume command before the impending election. Adam, the Liberal Chief Whip, wrote: "Those who follow Mr. Gladstone will all join in following Hartington, whereas there are many who call themselves moderate Liberals, but who would not move a finger to support Mr. Gladstone."[2] The formation of the Gladstone Ministry in 1880 was to emphasise the splits, and by the time its term of office had expired the coalition would no longer be able to maintain its existence.

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1. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 296-7.

2. Holland, vol. 1, p. 262.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIBERAL PARTY IN 1880

Mr. Gladstone in 1879 had rejected the certainty of various safe seats throughout the country and had chosen to fight Midlothian, Edinburgh. In late 1879 and again in 1880 he engaged in the famous Midlothian campaigns, denouncing the Government's policies at home [particularly their lack of economy and their legislation in arrears] and abroad, but especially the foreign policies of Lord Beaconsfield which had resulted, Gladstone asserted, in moral depravity and the unjust aggrandisement of the tyrannical power of the Turk. This campaign, carried on for several months, was received with great enthusiasm in Scotland and its reverberations echoed throughout the country. The Queen was highly offended by the vehemence, ferocity, and popular nature of the Gladstonian onslaught, not realising, as was her wont, that a new, more democratic age had followed, of necessity, the passage of the Reform Act of 1867, and that popular electioneering tours were now inevitable. Nor were her sentiments shared by Conservatives only: some measure of Whiggish opinion was summed up by Mr. Punch early in 1880: "Then the Moderate Liberals - Lord! how they hate him! [i.e. Gladstone] His power with the people does make them so wild. Ah! panders to popular feeling atrociously . . ."[1]

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1. From Punch, 24 January, 1880.

Had Lord Beaconsfield held the General Election immediately upon his return from Berlin in 1878, when the music-halls rang with his praises and "Peace with Honour" was the watchword of the day, he would undoubtedly have been victorious. For reasons which do not concern us here he waited, and by 1880 his estimation in the eyes of the electorate and his party's reputation were no longer as high as they had been. The voters began to realise that "Glory" was a rather fragile and ethereal figment, that Beaconsfield had almost brought the country to a war, and had started "little wars" in Afghanistan and Zululand which had resulted in severe blows to British prestige. But the Prime Minister did not realise the loss in public esteem which these events had cost him; nor did he take into sufficient account the Depression, which had resulted in a million pounds less being collected in taxation revenue than a year before, the unrest in Ireland, the troubles in the Transvaal, the impact of the Midlothian orator, or the extent to which the new organisation of the Liberal Party had strengthened its ability to procure votes. Misled by two by-elections early in 1880, chiefly by one in Liverpool on February 6 in which the Liberal candidate had become unhappily involved in the Home Rule question and the Conservative candidate had emerged victorious, Lord Beaconsfield announced the dissolution on March 8. In his speech in the House of Lords, the Prime Minister recognised the importance of the Irish question in British politics and

spoke of the vital significance which the Election would have. "Rarely in this century," he said, "has there been an occasion more critical. The power of England and the peace of Europe will largely depend on the verdict of the country."[1] In a final speech before the dissolution, Beaconsfield admitted to the Lords that the Depression had in fact deepened, but refused to commit himself to any action. "If the whole nation," he said, "chose to adopt a protection policy, nothing could resist that policy being carried into effect."[2] This was hardly to advocate a protectionist policy, however, nor was "Fair Trade" to be of any importance in Conservative thought until after the Election, and then only briefly.

The campaign was waged vigorously. Harcourt, Chamberlain, Hartington and others made memorable speeches, but the stellar attraction on the Liberal side was indubitably Mr. Gladstone himself. Estimates of the Midlothian campaign inevitably varied; the _Times_, for example, said that "his speeches were chiefly remarkable as phenomenal displays of individual energy and exercised very little real influence on opinion."[3] But this attitude was not widely shared; most commentators, including the biographers of Gladstone's Liberal contemporaries, felt his influence to be the single outstanding

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1. The _Annual Register_ for 1880, p. 32.
2. _Ibid._, p. 41.
3. ~~Quoted in~~ _Ibid._, p. 48.

advantage which the Liberal Party possessed.

The Liberals attacked the Government on many points; justice for Ireland, the depression, free trade, economy at home; above all, however, on the emotional, almost religious issues of foreign policy. Many Liberals, notably Lord Hartington, were vehement in their attacks on Home Rule, towards which a few Radicals, such as John Morley, were already casting thoughtful glances. The Conservatives, on the other hand, spoke of the glories of their record, emphasised the confusion about the Liberal leadership [Hartington still being the nominal leader, despite the Midlothian campaign], charged the Liberals with complicity over Home Rule and general inability to legislate or govern because of their internal divisions. For example, when John Bright reminded the working classes how much they owed to the Liberal Party and called for a radical solution to the Irish land problem, [i.e. by the creation of peasant proprietorship from money lent by the British treasury] the Whiggish *Economist* promptly disavowed the appeal, saying: "We are disposed to think that too much importance has been attached to Mr. Bright's speech . . . . It is in no sense the official programme of the Liberal Party in regard to Irish land."[1] Other Radicals supported franchise extension, local government and other proposals distasteful

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1. January 31, 1880, p. 114.

to the Whigs.

The Conservatives quite naturally made the most of these Liberal divisions of opinion, but with only scant success. Conservative writers, however, did their best, emphasising Whig-Radical differences over religion, over the role of the aristocracy, over the empire, and other issues. One anonymous Conservative wrote: "It was bitterly asserted, on a celebrated occasion, that a Conservative Government was an organised hypocrisy. Were any one disposed to frame a similar charge at the present moment, he would have to address it to a Liberal opposition."[1]

On March 20 Richard Cross, Conservative Home Secretary, attacked the Liberals on foreign policy, alleging that they were "weak": "If the Opposition came into power there was not a Government in Europe that would not understand that the policy of England was changed, that Russia might advance if she liked, and that the freedom of Europe was in danger."[2] In domestic policy the Liberals were helpless because disunified: "At the present moment they were not a Liberal Party, they were a party of atoms. The Home Rulers guided them."[3] Lord Beaconsfield in his election manifesto declared that the maintenance of the Empire was the matter of greatest

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1. Quarterly Review, January, 1880, p. 257.

2. Annual Register, 1880, p. 49.

3. Ibid., p. 49.

importance, and inferred that some Liberals "challenge the expediency of the Imperial character of this realm,"[1] an untrue inference, as not even the Social Radicals proposed Home Rule.

Generally speaking, however, the Liberals fought this campaign as a united party, since they concentrated on attacking the Government and did not discuss the burning issues which divided them and which would soon again rise to the fore. No official programme of specific Liberal promises was put forward as would be the case in subsequent elections. It is worth noting, however, that in this campaign the Liberals fought for the last time in the nineteenth century in apparent unity. In April, in the Nineteenth Century, the Reverend Guinness Rogers wrote: "The union of the Liberal Party is now a fait accompli. It is not to be supposed that there is or ever will be that absolute accord which to outward appearances exists in a party whose creed . . . resolves itself into one article - faith in Lord Beaconsfield. But the very eagerness with which this new 'ism' is pressed upon the country has worked wonders in the way of stifling internal divisions among Liberals."[2] While John Morley, editor of the Fortnightly Review, feared that the Whigs would be

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1. Ibid., p. 32.

2. April, 1880, p. 628.

quite as opposed to Irish reform as the Tories ["The largest landowners in Ireland are the representatives of the Houses of Cavendish and Stanley," he wrote in March], he nevertheless paid generous tribute to their aid in the campaign. Writing shortly afterwards, he wrote: "When the crisis was most violent, and Mr. Gladstone's supporters in Parliament were fewest, Cavendishes, Grosvenors, Howards, and Russells, were found side by side with Radicals from Birmingham and Sheffield."[1]

Most of the results were announced early in April, while the rest followed soon after. At best a Liberal-cum-Home-Ruler victory had been expected by most Liberals, but in fact whereas in 1874 there had been about 345 Tories, 250 Liberals, and 58 Irish Home Rulers, there were now 354 Liberals, 237 Conservatives, and 61 Home Rulers.[2] [The latter, who were still divided, were slowly being integrated and disciplined by the genius of Charles Stewart Parnell, who led, in 1880, about 35 of the group.]* It was a smashing, triumphant, Liberal victory, and most observers agreed in attributing it to two factors: the organisational work and Radical politics of Chamberlain and his friends, and the personality of Mr. Gladstone. Of the former, Chamberlain wrote to the Times

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1. Fortnightly Review, May, 1880, pp. 726-7.

2. See Appendix I.

that it had played a vitally important role. In 67 borough seats, he said, the "Caucus" had attempted to return Liberals; in 60 they were successful while in only seven were they beaten. In ten county constituencies the "Caucus" was undefeated. From Manchester, a correspondent wrote that the National Reform Union had been largely responsible for victory. In June, John Morley wrote of "the organisation which wrested so many seats from the Conservatives . . ."[1] And G. M. Young concludes: "Practical men without underrating the other elements in the catastrophe of 1880, were disposed to assign no small part of the results to the working of the Caucus, or, as it was afterwards called, the Birmingham system, the organisation on a democratic basis of the whole party in the borough."[2]

Of the Midlothian campaign we have already spoken and will touch only on one significant point. Though Gladstone did not understand the new forces which were cropping up in political life, he did understand that slowly his aristocratic friends were leaving the Liberal Party. In a Midlothian speech on April 1, 1880, he said: "We cannot reckon upon the wealth of the country, nor upon the rank of the country, nor upon the influence which rank and wealth usually bring. In the main these powers are against us, for wherever there is a close corporation, wherever there is a narrow and

1. Fortnightly Review, June, 1880, p. 865.

2. Young, G. M.: Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, London, 1937, p. 137.

sectional interest apart from that of the country, and desiring to be set up above the interest of the public, there, gentlemen, we the Liberal Party, have no friendship and no tolerance to expect."[1] But while Gladstone recognised the trend he did nothing to avert it; his only action was to deplore its existence. Wise leadership, understanding what was happening, might have encouraged the new forces, but Gladstone merely waited while the storm of working-class political action gradually mounted.

One other significant result of the election occurred in the voting itself: "One victory of real importance was won by the Government, for they beat the Liberal by 2 to 1 in the City of London."[2] So soon was the business class defection beginning.

It was a curious House of Commons which was thus elected in 1880. A large number of landed magnates were returned; the balance had not yet swung overwhelmingly to the business classes, even in the Liberal Party, as was to be the case by the century's end. In 1880 it is very roughly accurate to say that the territorial aristocracy was to be found among both Conservatives and Liberals, high finance was largely Whiggish, while the manufacturing and commercial classes were still largely Liberal, though there were some Conservative

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1. Morley, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 2, p. 610.

2. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 613.

M.P.'s who were manufacturers, principally from Lancashire; Richard Cross, Disraeli's Home Secretary, was a notable example. Figures of occupation are available for just under half the Liberal M.P.'s. Forty-nine of the 168 surveyed were country-gentlemen, retired military or naval officers, or had other private income. Seventy-one had business or commercial interests, including 8 bankers, 5 brewers, 19 merchants or shipowners, and 14 with mining, railway, or iron interests. This reflects the strong position in the Liberal Party of 1880 of bankers, shipowners and brewers. Forty-five were professional men; of these, just over half [23] were lawyers. Only three were of working-class origin.[1]

But while the Whig landed representation remained strong in the new House, yet the augury of the future was seen in the increased influence of the Radicals. A Radical writer pointed out the great gains of recent years, saying: "The gains which have accrued to the Liberals since 1868 have been made in the borough constituencies, where alone the Radical feelings of the people can obtain expression. There is now, both in Parliament and in the Cabinet, an absolute equality, if not in numbers, at least in influence, between the Radical and Whig sections of the Liberal Party."[2] "If not in

1. Also see Appendix VI.

2. Harris, William: <u>The History of the Radical Party in Parliament</u>, London, 1885, p. 483.

numbers" - aye, there's the rub, for of the 359 Liberal members only between a quarter and a third [some said as low a number as 70, while John Morley estimated 130] could properly be termed Radical, while the rest were either Gladstonians or still typical of pre-1867 Whiggish Liberals with no drive towards new ideas. Notable Radical members included, besides Chamberlain and Dilke: John Bright; Henry Labouchere and Charles Bradlaugh as members for Northampton; J. F. B. Firth, the tireless advocate of County Councils, especially for London; James Stansfeld, the feminist leader; the unorthodox economist Thorold Rogers; Chamberlain's ally Jesse Collings; Professor James Bryce, and the two working-class members Burt and Macdonald reinforced by a third, Henry Broadhurst, a strong and growing power in the Trade Union Congress. The influence of this stellar, if diverse team, was, however, weakened by their numerical inferiority and by the Whiggish predilections of their leader.

Queen Victoria had tried to keep Mr. Gladstone from the leadership, calling on first Lord Hartington, then Earl Granville to assume the Premiership. But both assured her that they could not undertake such a task, and at last Gladstone had to be called to lead "this shamefully heterogeneous union", as the Queen referred to the Liberal Party. Gladstone, [now beginning popularly to be known as the "Grand Old Man"] though he had been elevated to power largely by the Radicals and their organisation, acted as though he had no understanding

at all of the recently-enfranchised borough electors who were so largely the source of Radical strength. He used an old and tried procedure in limiting places in his Cabinet to men who had already held Government positions, but this procedure could no longer be valid in the new conditions; as his son wrote: "The composition of the Government was according to precedent, but it was not suited to the movements and changes of the day."[1] Thus, unfortunately, the Cabinet was almost entirely Whig in its composition. Earl Granville returned to the Foreign Office, while Hartington went to the important India Office; W. E. Forster, whose Radicalism had now become almost extinct, became Chief Secretary for Ireland. Sir William Harcourt, that curious cross between Whig and Radical, was made Home Secretary. The other Cabinet Ministers were an uninspiring but strongly Whiggish group, with Lord Selborne and the Duke of Argyll being specially noted for their conservatism. Only John Bright among the Radicals was asked to join the Cabinet, and in the humble capacity of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; Bright, moreover, was a personal friend of the Prime Minister's; almost 70 when the Cabinet was formed, his Radicalism was, as we have seen, largely a thing of the past. Here Gladstone paused. A more Whiggish Cabinet could hardly have been composed by Hartington himself,

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1. Gladstone, Herbert, op. cit., p. 171.

and "the Times remarked that if Hartington, an acknowledged Whig, had been Prime Minister, he would have been compelled to give the Radicals a real share in the Government; that Gladstone, with more haste than accuracy, was called a revolutionary, and that he would be obliged to re-assure the Whigs."[1]

Mr. Gladstone was loath to admit any representative of the new school of Social Radicalism into his Cabinet, or, indeed, any other Radical at all besides Bright,[2] but finally by pressure from several sources was compelled to alter his plans. Chamberlain's biographer writes: "It seemed that nothing could be done. In the face of this frowardness . . . Gladstone's surprise and displeasure were extreme . . . . It was pretty clear that Gladstone . . . would have to reckon with the new men and new times."[3]

Finally, the Prime Minister yielded to the pressures of his advisers and the Radical press, and decided to admit a Social Radical; faced with the claim of Chamberlain and Dilke that one should be in the Cabinet while the other should have a Ministry post outside, he admitted Chamberlain to the lowliest Cabinet position of the day, the Board of Trade, while relegating Dilke to the Undersecretaryship ~~for~~ of the Foreign

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1. Hammond, J. L.: Gladstone and the Irish Nation. London, 1938, pp. 168-9.

2. Though this reticence did not extend to non-Cabinet posts; Radical non-Cabinet ministers included Trevelyan, Mundella, Fawcett and Shaw-Lefevre.

3. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 299.

office, a not insignificant post since the Foreign Secretary was a Peer. This action, however, was a reversal of the expected procedure, for Dilke had a larger Parliamentary following than his colleague, but the "Radical twins", as as they were called, were placated for the time, though both felt apprehensions for the future. In the House of Commons the joke ran that B.C. now meant "Before Chamberlain" and A.D. "Anno Dilke", but Radicals did not lightly assume that they now held the dominant position in the Party. Lord Hartington and his associates remained in politics, many of them solely to combat the Radical influence within the Liberal Party. "An acute observer said at the time that the new Cabinet was three-fourths Whig and one-fourth Radical, but that the Liberal Party in the country was three-fourths Radical and one-fourth Whig, and that this fact would give to the Radical minority in the Cabinet a moral strength out of all proportion to their members there."[1] Right at the outset of the new Parliament Speaker Brand had said that the Prime Minister would have a difficult team to lead, with Radical journals and organisations pulling to the Left, and the landed Whig aristocracy pulling to the Right. John Morley spoke truly in wondering how the Duke of Argyll could possibly belong to the same party as the Radicals and exhorted

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1. Holland, Bernard, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 280.

the latter to work together to achieve their ends, unlike previous, frustrated generations of Radicals.[1]

The trouble then lay, basically, in the knowledge of the Social Radicals that they had been in large part responsible for victory, while the fruits of that victory had been lae largely denied them. Sweeping back into office with a triumphant majority such as had never been realised by the Liberal Party hitherto, even in 1868, the Ministerial forces soon found themselves frustrated. Chamberlain and Hartington acted like leaders of factions, which they were, and spent as much time and energy fighting each other as in their onslaughts upon the common enemy. Moreover, there was no real loyalty

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1. In the May, 1880, Fortnightly Review, Morley wrote: "The Advanced section then of the ministerial party now possess a parliamentary strength which has never belonged to them in our history before. In numbers, in ability, in popular support, they occupy a position of the greatest force. The nearest approach to it was the situation of the Radical Reformers in the first parliament of the reign of Queen Victoria, They were estimated at between seventy and eighty. They counted in their ranks men of such eminent and varied intellectual gifts as Bulwer and Roebuck, Grote and Charles Buller, Molesworth and Hume. A more remarkable group has never been seen since the Long Parliament. Its fate is full of instruction for their successors at this very hour . . . the opportunity was miserably lost . Their numbers were never made to tell . . . they never presented themselves to the imagination of the country as all animated by a great body of common principles . . . .

"The same fiasco will again take place, unless a sufficient number of the new men group themselves together for parliamentary action, with unflinching confidence in their own principles of thought, and with unswerving loyalty to one another. All depends on this. Otherwise we shall see what has so often been seen before, a series of great opportunities and little measures; a hollow appeal to broad principles, followed by narrow settlements which will not settle." [Fortnightly Review, vol. 27, pp. 737-8.]

within the Cabinet, for Ministers acted as if they were all Prime Ministers and lacked any real sense of teamwork. Mr. Gladstone, who was never at his best in a Cabinet, could not supply the proper leadership and served his most useful intra-Cabinet function in acting, along with Bright, as an intermediary between Chamberlain and Hartington.

The new Government was hampered by the uncompromising opposition of the Queen, now completely under the sway of Lord Beaconsfield. Professor Smellie writes: ". . .She was exasperated by her Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone, and a Cabinet which seemed to her to have, as she said: 'no respect for kings or princes or any of the landmarks of the Constitution.'"[1] The Government was hampered as well by its lack of a positive programme, for it had only a vague intention to reverse the work of Lord Beaconsfield abroad, which it soon found impossible to do, and to practise economy at home. In such conditions it was soon severely buffeted by the storms of circumstance. It was disconcerted by the Bradlaugh case and by the activities of the so-called "Fourth Party", which arose from it. Finally, it suffered from the complicated and fierce nature of the many problems of Ireland and from the activities of the Irish Nationalists in the House of Commons. It was due to the impact of all of these problems

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1. Smellie, K. B. S.: A Hundred Years of ~~British~~ English Government, London, 1937, p. 291.

that so little positive good came from the Liberal Government, and that so many Liberal, Radical, and Labour hopes were frustrated.

The Queen's speech, read on May 20, called for a speedy disentanglement from Imperial commitments. "Complications in the East" were to be ended, Afghanistan was to be pacified, and the Transvaal settlers were to have institutions "based on large and liberal principles of self-government".[1] Little domestic legislation was projected. A Burials Bill was suggested, the Ballot Act was to be renewed, and bills were to be introduced "as time may permit . . . for giving more effectual protection to the occupiers of land against injury from ground game, for determining on a just principle the liability of employers for injuries sustained by workmen, and for the extension of the borough franchise in Ireland."[2] A bill to relieve Irish rural distress was considered and the "Coercion" Act was to be left to expire. It was a small programme to be introduced after such a triumphant victory, and many troubles were in store for Liberals.

The first problem which arose to confront the Government was the Bradlaugh affair. Charles Bradlaugh, a proclaimed atheist and advocate of birth-control, had been returned

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1. _Annual Register_, 1880, p. 66.

2. _Ibid._, p. 66.

[along with Henry Labouchere] as member for Northampton, then reputed to be the most Radical town in England. As O'Connell had forced the question of Cathlic Emancipation into the open and Rothschild had done the same for the Jews, now at last, through Bradlaugh, the question of the civil equality of atheists and free thinkers was brought to the fore. The Conservative opposition naturally eagerly seized the opportunity to humiliate the Government and were peculiarly aided by the existence of the self-styled "Fourth Party". This small group of four Conservatives, which sprang to life over the Bradlaugh affair and which was led by Lord Randolph Churchill, rivalled and even outdid the Irish Nationalists [the third Party] in vituperation and malice. They delighted in driving wedges between the Liberal leadership and their followers, both Whig and Radical, and they delighted almost as much in attacking their own party leadership in the person of Sir Stafford Northcote. Encouraged by Lords Beaconfield and Salisbury, the group [consisting of Churchill, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, John Gorst, and Salisbury's nephew A. J. Balfour] was almost a match even for Mr. Gladstone himself, and was largely instrumental in making the 1880-1885 Parliament for the Liberals what Sir Winston Churchill calls "the most disastrous and even fatal period in their party history."[1]

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1. Churchill, Sir Winston: Lord Randolph Churchill, London, 1906, vol. 1, p. 127.

Led by the Fourth Party, which was joined by many of the Whigs, the House of Commons refused to allow Bradlaugh either to affirm [instead of swear] or to take the usual oath, and the House was witness to such colourful scenes as the Northampton member's forced ejection and consignment to the Clock Tower. Speaker Brand was notable for his pusillanimous conduct, and even Gladstone took no lead until too late. Towards the end of the debate, after an adverse report from a special committee established to consider the problem, both Gladstone and Bright made moving speeches for toleration, but by then the die had been cast. The House refused Bradlaugh's appeal to take the oath by 275 votes to 230. The affair continued to be a hindrance during the entire Parliament, and in 1883 an Affirmation Bill failed by a majority of three.

Not only, in the Bradlaugh case, had many Whigs deserted the Ministerial side, but the Government had received a severe attack of scorn and ridicule; as Churchill remarks: "The credit of the Ministry was injured in Parliament and in the country the Liberal Party were not unsuccessfully represented as the champions of Bradlaugh and his abominated doctrines."[1] And the _Economist_ said: "Catholic Liberals spoke as if their religion were in danger. The House, in fact, went to pieces. All intellectual coherence was lost as well as all party

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1. _Ibid._, p. 131.

discipline; upwards of a hundred Liberals stayed away . . ."[1] The Government had lost much prestige from the affair and this early blow to its authority encouraged dissident groups in the party to greater independence. Right at the outset of its life it had received a rebuff which revealed the Liberal Party to be far weaker than its numerical majority indicated and which was an invitation to attack from Opposition, Irish, and dissident Liberals alike.

Further reverses awaited the Government. A bill to prevent the menace of rabbits and hares [the Ground Game Act] by allowing tenant farmers to shoot them, was debated in lively manner, and though it was finally passed, in weakened form, back-bench Liberals and Ministers had boldly denounced each other and been denounced in turn. Whiggish landowners resented this attack on what they considered their rights, while Radicals wished a much more extensive revision of the Game Acts. A Bill for local option in regard to liquor control passed its Second Reading by 229 to 203; significantly, both the Prime Minister and Lord Hartington were found in the minority, and on a bill concerning clerical restrictions, only the last minute intervention of Mr. Gladstone averted defeat.

These early dissensions among the Liberals: discontent over the meagre Government programme, the Bradlaugh affair,

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1. June 26, 1880, p. 731.

the "Rabbits and Hares" Act, had all produced discord among the Ministerial party by an early date. Nor did Mr. Gladstone's budget contain any great measures to pacify the Radicals, though it was received without criticism. Writing as early as June 5, the Economist said of the Government: "Nothing is going right . . . . One section of the Party is dissatisfied because the Radicals are over-represented in the Ministry. Another section is dissatisfied because the Whigs exert too great an influence on policy . . . . The opposition is united, active, and contemptuous; as a result of this, the Liberals hardly realise that they are in a majority."[1]

There were several minor but useful measures passed in 1880, like those of Chamberlain in connection with Grain Cargoes and Seamen's Wages. There were also the useful Savings-Bank and Post-Office Money Orders Acts of Fawcett, and valuable education work undertaken by Mundella. The two most controversial, however, were the Burials Act and the Employers' Liability Act, and again the Liberal Party was divided.

The Burials Act was intended to open church graveyards to persons of any religious denomination, though clergy were relieved of the necessity to perform services for non-Christians. Many of the Whigs were opposed to the Bill as

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1. June 5, 1880, p. 641.

it stood and it was subsequently amended to permit only Christian services. This amendment, however, met Radical opposition, and was finally carried by a majority of only three. Again the Fourth Party attacked in force, as they had done in the Ground Game Act, and gravely disconcerted many supporters of the Government.

The other measure of significance was the Employers' Liability Act, the first of its kind, introduced by Joseph Chamberlain in his capacity as President of the Board of Trade. It ran again into the same difficulties as previous measures. As was frankly admitted at the time, the Bill represented a compromise between the supporters of complete freedom of the employer from any liability and those who wished "to abolish the doctrine of common employment, and make him liable to all injured persons alike."[1] As with previous bills, the subject was widely discussed outside Parliament, and both extreme views, the Annual Register said, found able advocates. Here again the Fourth Party leapt into the breach and stirred up all possible discord; they said that the Government Bill was neither one thing nor another, that it should be frank and honest or else non-existent. Their leader's son records: "The Government was gravely disconcerted. They found themselves between two

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1. Annual Register for 1880, p. 94.

forces. Below the gangway, the Radicals stirred uneasily at such unanswerable arguments; and behind the Treasury Bench the wealthiest supporters of the Party were gnashing their teeth at such reckless proposals."[1] Moreover: "The significance of so much activity out-of-doors was noted by Mr. Gladstone, who in September wrote to Lord Rosebery: 'What is outside Parliament seems to me to be fast mounting, nay to have already mounted to an importance much exceeding what is inside. Parliament deals with laws, and branches of the social tree, not the roots.'"[2]

Foreign affairs also caused trouble. In the summer a remarkable Radical demonstration took place. Parliament was asked to sanction a grant of money to erect a statue to the Prince Imperial, son of Napoleon III, who had been killed in the British War against the Zulus in 1879. A motion was brought forward to oppose the grant, and was carried despite the resistance both of Mr. Gladstone and Sir Stafford Northcote. According to Morley, feelings were at fever pitch upon the Liberal benches, and despite their leader's "earnest exhortations, they voted almost to a man against him, and he only carried into the lobby ten official votes on the Treasury Bench."[3] Among Ministers, Bright, Chamberlain, Dilke, Fawcett,

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1. Churchill, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 138.
2. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 4.
3. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 6.

and Shaw-Lefevre voted with the insurgents. Another source of Liberal friction was the Government's refusal to recall Sir Bartle Frere from Natal. The author of the Zulu war, Sir Bartle was obstinate and authoritative, yet the Gladstone Government refused to recall him until August, and in effect carried on the very policies of the Government which they had condemned and ousted, thus arousing great Radical resentment. Thus the path to Majuba was staked out, and would soon carry the Liberals into disaster.

While South Africa was the cause of greatest Liberal discord, there were other instances which displayed the cleavage between what was basically Radical support for non-intervention and Whig Imperialism. Whig pressure prevented Gladstone from ceding Cyprus to Greece, and the Whigs were opposed to the reversal of Beaconsfield's policies; the reversal threatened to involve Great Britain in unilateral war with Turkey, but it eventually took place effectively and peacefully. The Whigs were also opposed to the withdrawal from Afghanistan which resulted in one military defeat in July, 1880, though their pressure was lessened by the fact that Hartington was Indian Secretary. Thus in foreign as well as domestic policy there was a clear divergence between Radical and Whig principles and one which would grow with the years.

It was, however, the Irish problem which was to be the real _bête noire_ in 1880 and subsequent years, the tragic

feature of this Parliament; nor was the occurrence of strife and outrages in Ireland in any way alleviated by Mr. Gladstone's serious illness during August. His place as leader was taken by Lord Hartington, to the satisfaction of few Liberals. Ireland was suffering chiefly as a result of the agricultural depression of the later 1870's, squalor had been increasing fast, and the Land Act of 1870 had not prevented an increase in evictions and numbers of homeless tenants. Evictions, in fact, rose from 463 in 1877 to 2,110 in 1880. The problem had deepened due to the more able exposition of their case which Irishmen were now putting forward. This exposition was aided by the formation, in 1879, of the Land League, under the capable leadership of Parnell and Michael Davitt; the League's efforts to alleviate the distress of tenants took both legal and illegal forms. It was established to achieve two definite aims: one was the reduction of rack-rents, the other was peasant proprietorship of the Irish land. In April, 1880, the League put forward an emergency plan to suspend most rents for a period of two years, a plan supported by many British Radicals. As the year progressed, so did the power of the League; paid organisers were appointed, membership increased to hundreds of thousands, and Land Courts established by the League were widely popular. The leaders kept discontent high by frequent, provocative speeches, and financing from Irish Americans was generous. Moreover, the Home Rule group in the House of Commons had increased both in size and

in ability in the election of 1880, and under Parnell's leadership it was becoming a disciplined organisation capable of much obstruction.

Although at this time no important Liberal, not even John Morley, was specifically on record as favouring Home Rule, there was widespread sentiment within the Radical ranks in favour of alleviating the disastrous conditions which prevailed in Ireland, and no one felt more keenly the need for action than Mr. Gladstone himself. In autumn, 1877, Gladstone had paid a three-week visit to Ireland; prophetically Hartington wrote to Granville: "I am afraid that the renewed interest which his visit has given him in Irish politics will not make our lives more comfortable."[1] A Compensation for Disturbance Bill was introduced in the House of Commons by W. E. Forster, the Irish Chief Secretary; admittedly a temporary measure, the Bill was to be valid for only a year and only in two of the four quadrants of Ireland. It was intended to be followed by a Land Act, the favoured Radical reform.

The Bill was bitterly combated in the House of Commons from all sides; Radicals, Whigs, Irish, Conservatives; it pleased no one. Some felt that it went too far and was an endorsement of lawlessness, while others opposed it as being far too mild and not confronting the true problem. Lord

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 242-3.

Hartington, though he supported the Bill, did so without any real conviction, and told his secretary that "this attempt to govern by a combination of Whigs and Radicals is to ride two horses."[1] Lord Lansdowne resigned from the Government in order to fight the Bill in the Lords, where he was supported by other Whigs. "Landowners and capitalists," John Morley records, "were full of consternation,"[2] and well they might be, for the land agitation affected the whole of English holdings in Ireland and struck at the very basis of the aristocratic theory of landownership. As we have seen above, Whigs like the Cavendishes [to which family Lord Hartington belonged] and Stanleys were among the largest of the Irish landlords, and strongly favoured the measures of "coercion" which the Radicals detested.

With such division among the Government, the Conservatives had an easy task. Twenty Liberals opposed the second reading of the Compensation for Disturbance Bill and twenty abstained; even on the final reading, sixteen Liberal votes were recorded in opposition, while Parnell and his followers walked out. When the Bill came to the Lords, in September, the Conservative peers determined to wreak as much havoc as they could among the Liberals; Disraeli's biographers write: "Beaconsfield was successful in his political strategy. The Whigs took the

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1. ~~Quoted in~~ Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 332.
2. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 49.

lead in resisting the Bill in the Lords. Lord Lansdowne left the Government rather than support it; the rejection was moved by Lord Grey, the son of the Whig premier of 1832; and in the majority of 282 who condemned the Bill there were more professing Liberals than the 51 who were all that could be collected to vote in its favour."[1] Thus the Bill was defeated and the Irish problem rendered still more difficult to settle.

Meanwhile, events were growing steadily more ugly in Ireland. In September Lord Mountmorres was murdered in County Galway, a murder which shocked public opinion in England and hardened sentiment against the Irish. Responding to Parnell's plea for a "more Christian" means of protest, the "Boycott" system was devised, whereby detested agents and landlords were shunned. Beginning in the autumn with Captain Boycott himself, the practice was soon widespread. Sir Philip Magnus writes of boycotting: "It started when Captain Boycott, the agent of Lord Erne, was treated as a leper; his servants departed; shopkeepers, stablemen, laundresses refused to serve him; postmen mislaid his letters; his crops remained unharvested; no one would answer when he spoke. The movement spread like wildfire through the Irish countryside; it was applied to anyone who accepted a holding from which the tenant had been evicted, as well as

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1. Monypenny, W. F. and Buckle, G. E.: Life of Disraeli, London, 1920, vol. 6, p. 586.

to landlords and their agents."[1] The result of the mass resort to boycotting was a significant drop in evictions in the last quarter of 1880.

As misery followed outrage and both were compounded, a majority of the Cabinet decided that the extraordinary powers of the Irish executive, originally allowed to lapse by Forster, must be renewed. For long the battle raged in the Cabinet. A majority was finally collected to support "coercion", strengthened by the acquittal in September of Parnell, Davitt and others by a Dublin jury where they had been tried under ordinary law for conspiracy against the Crown in fomenting agrarian outrages. Gladstone, who was opposed to coercion and supported the use of existing police powers together with a humane land policy, later observed that Forster "allowed himself to be persuaded by the Government agents in Ireland that the root of the evil lay within small compass; that there were in the several parishes a certain limited number of unreasonable and mischievous men, that these men were known to the police, and that if summary powers were confided to the Irish government by the exercise of which these objectionable persons might be removed, the evil would die out of itself."[2] John Bright and Chamberlain

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1. Magnus, [Sir] Philip: <u>Gladstone</u>, London, 1954, p. 296.
2. Morley, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 3, p. 49.

fought hard against the coercive policy in the Cabinet and the latter threatened to resign. Chamberlain, backed by the National Liberal Federation, had wanted to fight the House of Lords over the rejection of the Compensation for Disturbance Bill, but his desire had not been supported in the Cabinet, not even by Bright; now, while his resignation lay in Gladstone's hands for four weeks, the crisis raged ever higher and the safety of the Cabinet was imperilled. Finally, however, the Radicals and Mr. Gladstone were won over and it was agreed that coercion and land reform would be introduced early in 1881. The land policy was as much hated by Hartington and the other Whigs as coercion had been by the Radicals, but that something was urgently needed was evident, for as Morley comments: "Things were bad enough. In Galway they had a policeman for every forty-seven adult males, and a soldier for every ninety-seven. Yet dangerous terrorism was rampant . . . . Coercion accompanied by land reform became the urgent policy."[1]

The situation of the Liberal Party, therefore, at the end of 1880, was far from happy. Troubles were apparent in three places and were not easy to assuage; at home, abroad, and in Ireland. Everywhere it seemed that the Whig solution was as different from the Radical as from the Conservative one; usually, indeed, it seemed far more so.

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1. Ibid., p. 51.

The Social Radical campaign was fully launched and was quite evidently to grow stronger in the years to come, particularly as the force of Whig obstructionism tended to drive Mr. Gladstone into the hands of the Radicals. Even the optimistic Morley observed in December, 1880: "During the next few weeks we must expect to hear many rumours of coalition between the Moderate Liberals and Whigs and the Conservatives. The idea, of course, has some plausibility about it, and there may seem to be no reason why the report should not be verified sooner or later by the event."[1]

The Whigs and Moderate Liberals were growing ever more frightened by the threats from their Left. They realised that their ascendancy was gone and that the chasm dividing them from the Radicals was deep and severe. Many agreed with Lord Hartington, whose stated reason for remaining in political life was, as noted above, to mitigate the Radical influence within the Liberal Party rather than to take any constructive political stand. Hartington wrote to Gladstone on December 19: "The time must come when further concession becomes impossible. I hope that there may not be in the future occasions of so much difference, but if it should be otherwise, I think that I am entitled to point out to you

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1. <u>Fortnightly Review</u>, December, 1880, p. 811.

that in my case, such a difference would not be an isolated one, but the culminating point of a long series of differences."[1] The subject of this letter was Ireland, but it could equally well have referred to many other points of contention among Liberals. The feelings of Moderate Liberals were summed up well in an October, 1880, article in the Nineteenth Century by Edward Wilson, entitled "The Unstable Equilibrium of Parties". Wilson wrote: "Moderate men do not contemplate without alarm the tendencies which are supposed to predominate in the new party majority . . . . The Radical section, who have been immensely strengthened not only in numbers but in spirit and discipline by the 'Caucus' system, have declared that they will not be content if their views are thrust into the background to avoid alarming the Whigs . . . . The Radical minority which was powerless to shape and colour Liberalism even ten years ago has turned itself into a majority within the party, and has organised that majority . . . by the adoption of the machinery of the American convention system . . . . Those who belong to the party of moderation, whether they call themselves Liberals or Conservatives, cannot join in the enterprises which the Radical party avow, and to which the Ministry are apparently tending . . . . When one is bent on going North and the other on going South, it is puerile to talk of a compromise. The one section or the other must

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1. Holland, Bernard, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 335.

succumb . . . . The Radical alliance in fact was comparatively harmless when Radicals were few, and had little influence in Parliament, and next to none over the Government. But it must be looked at very differently when one-half of the Liberal majority professes Radical opinions . . . "[1] Moreover the Whigs suffered from the knowledge that, as T. L. Oxley wrote in 1880: "the principal result of the first Parliamentary session over which the new Gladstone Cabinet has presided, will incontestably be the manifest progress accomplished by the Radical fraction of the Cabinet."[2]

The threat of a party split was apparent, therefore, as early as 1880, with the Moderate Liberals aligning themselves with the Conservatives. But had the menace to the Liberal Party been only from the Right, the Party could easily have sustained the loss and carried on backed by all the progressive forces in the country. It is rather the contention of this thesis that the threat came not only from the Right but from the Left as well, from the adherents to Socialism as well as from the more conservative defenders of the old order. Gladstonian Liberalism had now pressed on to a point where it found itself in a quandary; if it continued to progress it would lose supporters and have to change its whole basic structure and ideology; if it stayed its progress it would

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1. October, 1880, pp. 565-572.

2. Oxley, op cit., p. 5.

lose even more heavily and become identified with reaction. In the event, it tried to follow both courses and accordingly suffered both consequences. We now turn to examine the forces on the Left which threw up the challenge to the Liberal Party. In the later chapters we shall see howthe Party responded to this challenge.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES, 1880 - 1900

The 1880's and 1890's were years which witnessed the growth of an aroused social conscience on the part of many members of the middle classes. It is of course true that manifestations of this social conscience did not disappear around mid-century and then suddenly spring to life full-grown in 1880. Social movements existed in attenuated form after the deaths of Chartism and Christian Socialism around 1850-5, but they had only a weak and intermittent existence and were little heeded. Socialism itself was virtually non-existent, and G. D. H. Cole declares categorically: "Between the late 'fifties and the early 'eighties there was in Great Britain no Socialist movement."[1]

Around 1880, however, this situation was changing, and the pace of the change was quickened with passing years. Many leaders of middle-class thought were to lose their faith in the economic laissez-faire precepts of Gladstonian Liberalism and to take cognizance of the plight of their fellow-citizens living in squalor and insecurity. Mrs. Webb points out: "The origin of the ferment is to be discovered in a new consciousness of sin among men of intellect and men of property. . . .'The sense of sin has been the starting point

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1. Cole, G.D.H.: A History of Socialist Thought, vol. 2, London, 1954, p. 379.

of progress' was, during those years, the oft-repeated saying of Samuel Barnett,..founder of Toynbee Hall."[1] This "sense of sin" was not an accidental phenomenon; it had deep-rooted causes which had been gaining strength and which after 1880 came rapidly to the surface.

The first of these causes was the Great Depression, mention of which has already been made. In many ways it was the business classes, largely Liberal in outlook, which were most severely injured by the impact of the Depression. In fact, Henry Pelling goes so far as to state that the period from 1875 to 1895 "was called a Depression because there was a notable decline in the return on industrial investments, which hit the middle class."[2] Another recent writer comments that the working class "had never been content with the economic system . . . [so] the 'Great Depression' had not been able to discredit it in their eyes, though the questionings it had caused among the middle-classes had contributed valuable assistance to the clarification of the workers' grievances."[3] Slowly there dawned the realisation that smugness and complacency were ill-founded, that Britain's

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1. Webb, Beatrice: op. cit., (edition of 1926), pp. 179-180.

2. Pelling, Henry: The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900, London, 1954, p. 8.

3. Crowley, D. W.: The Origins of the Revolt of the British Labour Movement from Liberalism, unpublished thesis, London, 1952, p. 660.

economic ascendancy was fast disappearing, and that perhaps the "iron laws" of classical economics were in reality only a set of axioms of dubious accuracy and limited application. As an economic historian has written, the instability of the economic and social order, for both rich and poor, was "more clearly revealed than ever before. In a society as rich as that of Great Britain, this insecurity seemed to many thinkers a monstrous thing . . ."[1]

The forms that the reaction to the Depression took varied considerably; among some circles Lord Radolph Churchill's "Fair Trade" League became significant in the early 'eighties, while in others the fact became clear that something more basic must be done to protect all sections of the community. Many Victorian thinkers became suddenly aware that "progress" had nothing of the inevitable about it, and that if Britain was to continue in any kind of prosperous existence the organised force of the state must be allowed to function freely.

It is hard to over-estimate the shock to established customs and ways of thinking which was caused by the Great Depression. A Royal Commission on the Depression was established by the Government in 1885; its report for the first time "gave official recognition to unemployment and

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1. Dietz, F. C.: <u>An Economic History of England</u>, New York, 1942, p. 493.

distribution of wealth as problems demanding the attention of society."[1] It was an age of searching for new social values and ideals and the manifestations of this searching were to be perilous to the effective existence of the Gladstonian Liberal Party.

If the Great Depression, then, was the single most important cause in beginning the movement of the middle classes in new directions, it was far from the only one. There was also, for example, the Radicalism of Chamberlain and Dilke, centred respectively in Birmingham and London, which challenged the established order in many ways, as seen above. But due to Chamberlain's defection over Home Rule and Dilke's sudden disappearance from political leadership due to an unfortunate divorce suit, a great body of Radical opinion was left leaderless and some of it turned away from Liberalism completely. Thus while Radical Liberalism had organised its movement, the benefit was largely reaped by non-Liberal organisations. Similarly, Charles Bradlaugh's secularist and republican movement of the late 'sixties and 'seventies gained many adherents [though most of them tended to be more working-class than bourgeois in character] who turned even further away from orthodox Liberalism in the 'eighties and after Bradlaugh's death in 1891.

Another force strengthening the trend away from Liberal-

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1. Lynd, Helen. M.: England in the Eighteen-Eighties, New York, 1945, p. 163.

ism was the land question, of particular [though not exclusive] significance in Ireland. The Land Tenure Reform Association was one of many groups which agitated to change the land laws and which favoured the dispersal of the huge landed estates. Here was a particular example of the trend away from political Liberalism. Many Radical Liberals were in favour of small holdings and some even endorsed the land nationalisation campaign of which Alfred Russel Wallace, a Socialist, was to be the chief apostle. But in supporting land nationalisation, Liberals were also helping in the general attack on the vested interests which they as well as the Conservatives existed to protect. Auberon Herbert, a laissez-faire Radical, in his novel A Politician in Trouble about his Soul, saw clearly that land was but one facet of private property which must be protected if the rest was also to be safeguarded. One of his characters was made to say: "If Government undertakes in any way the task of arranging and distributing property, it at once enters on the force-relation . . . . For those of us who wish to build up the idea of a complete and perfect liberty, the great effort at this moment should be to reconcile our people heartily to private property, whether in land or in any other thing . . . . That English land is not largely held by the small owners is a great public calamity, but it is not to be repaired by the greater one of either petty or vast confiscations . . . . If

there is no private property in land, how can there be private property in all other matters of production, seeing that they are simply derived from the land?"[1] But the Radicals who hated the landed aristocracy did not see the breach which they were perforce making, and if it was true, as Hubert Bland later asserted, that "your progressive . . . is not at all sure that nationalisation, free land, and peasant proprietorship are not the names for one and the same proposal,"[2] the very confusion thus made resulted in an obscuring and weakening of the defences of private property. Herbert was rare among Radicals in understanding this point. Ireland was a further source of trouble, and the Land League, led by Michael Davitt [who was also a Socialist], heightened the attack on the system of large private holdings, as noted above.

The tradition of Christian Socialism was still living by 1880, and the work of Maurice, Ludlow and Kingsley had not been entirely forgotten. In part their influence had a literary expression, as with Ruskin, whose ethics came from the New Testament and whose attacks on the established order were revealed in such renowned works as Unto This Last and Fors Clavigera. Ruskin's influence was to appear in the 'eighties, though by then he himself was no longer active as a social agitator. Maccoby says of Ruskin that he was the

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1. Herbert, Auberon: A Politician in Trouble about his Soul, London, 1884, pp. 256-58.
2. Bland, Hubert: The Outlook, in Fabian Essays, Jubilee Edition, London, 1948, p. 199.

inspirer of much of the Christian Socialism of the 'eighties, and William Morris also owed much to him. aA tradition of literary protest existed as well, with the writings of such diverse authors as Dickens, Carlyle, Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Browning, and Thomas Hood. One of the best known of the literary protesters was Matthew Arnold, whose Culture and Anarchy, published three times between 1865 and 1882 was a thoughtful, reasoned protest against the materialism of his age. As the editor of Culture and Anarchy makes clear: "Arnold was no Socialist . . . . But he believed in the state as the organ of the right reason and best self of the whole community."[1]

Arnold was a profound believer in the intertwined values of religion and culture, and he said unequivocally: "Culture suggests the idea of the State . . . . Our best self . . . knows that it is stablishing the State, or organ of our collective best self, of our national right reason; and it has the testimony of conscience that it is stablishing the State on behalf of whatever great changes are needed, just as much as on behalf of order."[2] Arnold was a herald of many middle-class observers who were to feel that "our social progress would be happier if there were not so many of us so very poor . . ."[3] Soon after the 1880 election Arnold wrote:

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1. Arnold, Matthew: Culture and Anarchy, Cambridge, 1932, Introduction by J. Dover Wilson, p. xxxv.
2. Ibid., pp. 96-7.
3. Ibid., p. 197.

> "... . we have an upper class materialised, a middle class vulgarised, a lower class brutalised. And this we owe to our inequality . . . . But of inequality, as a defeat to the instinct in the community for expansion, and as a sure sign of trouble, Liberal statesmen are very shy to speak . . . . In Ireland, Liberal statesmen never look the thing fairly in the face, or apply a real remedy like the reform of the law of bequest, but invent palliatives like the Irish Land Act [of 1870]. . . . And in England, where inequality and the system of great estates produces trouble too, though not so glaringly as in Ireland, in England Liberal statesmen shrink even more from looking the thing in the face and apply little palliatives . . . . Not until the need in man for expansion is better understood by Liberal statesmen - that it includes equality as well as political liberty and free trade - and is cared for by them, but cared for not singly and exorbitantly, but in union and proportion with the progress of man in conduct, and his growth in intellect and knowledge, and his nearer approach to beauty and manners, will Liberal Governments be secure."[1]

Never again, in fact, were Liberal Governments to be secure, and their lack of security came from just this cause.

The Positivist sect was a small body which was, however, in many ways favourable to the growth of a non-Liberal collectivist movement. Though John Morley, one of the important Positivists, was to become a leading Liberal politician, Frederic Harrison and Professor E. S. Beesly served as outposts of anti-Liberal thought and friends of trade unionism, notably in the crucial years of the 'seventies. Beesly in particular was receptive to Socialist causes, arranged many meetings and lectures for socialists and generally gave credence to the idea that it was possible to

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1. Nineteenth Century, vol. 8, July, 1880, pp. 17-18.

be respectable yet collectivist. Through his journal, The Beehive, Beesly helped to arouse working-class protest.

Another group which, rather in spite of itself, helped to awaken the middle classes to the evils of laissez-faire was the Charity Organisation Society. This group had been founded in 1869 by Octavia Hill and was sustained by the hard work and devotion of Miss Hill and her co-workers, chief among whom were the Reverend and Mrs. Samuel Barnett, W. H. Freemantle, and C. S. Loch. The C.O.S. was strictly laissez-faire in its methods; one of its principal measures, in fact, was to build houses for the poor which were to be "reasonably" profitable for the builders. The C.O.S. was motivated by the slogan that "the poor starve because of the alms they receive," and determined to stop indiscriminate charity by becoming a central charity agency and by restricting alms to the "deserving poor" alone. Mrs. Webb wrote that the C.O.S. held, along with many "enlightened members of the governing class . . . interested in the problem of poverty . . . the belief - it may almost be called an obsession - that the mass-misery of great cities arose mainly, if not entirely, from spasmodic, indiscriminate and unconditional doles, whether in the form of alms or in that of Poor Law relief . . . ."[1] The fanaticism which inspired many members of this group was

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1. Webb, Beatrice: op. cit., Harmondsworth, 1938, p. 227.

related to their belief in the wage-fund, which would be lessened by however much was given in charity, a belief which Mrs. Webb describes in devastating terms in My Apprenticeship. This opposition of the C.O.S. to the dole, this hatred of "conscience money", awakened many to the questions of poverty. The C.O.S. thrust the "condition of the people" question right before the noses of the wealthy, and the result was in many cases rather other than its sponsors had expected. Many of the newly-awakened came to the conclusion that a system which permitted such misery needed far more drastic revision than a policy of opposition to the dole. In fact, as we shall see later, even some members of the C.O.S. itself at last rebelled against its heartless maxims.

A final element which contributed to the awakening of the middle classes after 1880 was the attitude of many economists to the problems which the Great Depression presented. Men like Professor Cairnes, Thorold Rogers, and John Stuart Mill realised the need for change, and after 1880, as we shall see, many others joined them. Mill in his autobiography had written that he "looked forward to a time when Society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious; when the rule that they who do not work shall not eat will be applied not to paupers only, but impartially to all . . . . The social problem of the future is . . . how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership

in the raw material of the globe . . . "[1] Discussing the woes of unregulated capitalism, he wrote: "If this, or Communism, were the alternatives, all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism would be but as dust in the balance."[2]

Before 1880, then, the anti-Liberal collectivist [they were too vague properly to be called Socialist] tendencies within middle-class and intellectual thought, soon to cause a serious reaction against the shibboleths and rites of economic and political Liberalism, were largely due to the following reasons: (1) the Great Depression; (2) the Radical movements of Chamberlain, Dilke and Bradlaugh, which were to prepare many for collectivism; (3) the Land Question; (4) the traditions of Christian Socialism and literary protests; (5) the Charity Organisation Society; finally, (6) the reaction to laissez-faire among the economists themselves. We now turn to examine the forms which the middle-class challenge manifested between 1880 and 1900.

The earliest, though perhaps one of the least influential, groups, was the Marxist organisation, the Democratic Federation. Its formation was largely due to the labours of Henry Mayers Hyndman, one of the most remarkable of the late Victorian figures. Hyndman was born of a wealthy family of Ulster descent, and possessed a considerable fortune

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1. Mill, J.S.: _Autobiography_, London, 1924, p. 169.
2. Lynd, Helen: _op. cit._, p. 101.

which had been derived from the West Indies and which he spent unsparingly in the cause of Socialism. Himself a graduate of Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, Hyndman became convinced of the Marxist case while reading a French version of Das Kapital on a business trip to the United States in 1880. Parenthetically, it may be remarked that the formation of an organised Marxist movement in Britain was delayed by the fact that there was no translation of the Marxian bible into English until late in the 'eighties.

Although Hyndman had been a Conservative, unlike most Socialists of his day, he had rebelled against Liberalism from the start of his career. Writing about 1900 he commented: "The Whigs and the Liberals are the worst and most treacherous enemies of the people. In no country . . . has any political party ever played such a game successfully for so long a period. The Radicals have throughout been merely the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for the Whigs, the Liberals, and their lawyers."[1] Hyndman saw the misery of his day, and wrote that the "misery, degradation and physical deterioration around me . . . has more influence in making and keeping me a Social-Democrat than anything else."[2]

In January, 1881, Hyndman published an article entitled

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1. Hyndman, H. M.: "How I Became a Socialist, London, 1900(?) p. 9.

2. Hyndman, H. M.: The Record of an Adventurous Life, London, 1911, pp. 294-5.

"The Dawn of a Revolutionary Epoch" in the Nineteenth Century. In the same month a meeting was held in London, the composition of which was drawn largely from the Liberal and Radical clubs and Irish committees of the metropolis. Though most of Hyndman's Radical allies soon dropped out of the Democratic Federation [whose title was changed to Social Democratic Federation in 1884], as the organisation launched at the 1881 meeting was called, his most ardent comrades proved to be of the bourgeoisie. It was, in fact, an annoying manifestation that Hyndman "found at once that his first allies must be men of the same professional type which theoretically he was abandoning."[1] This predominance of bourgeois elements continued throughout the early history of the S.D.F., and its early executive council was almost entirely middle-class in composition. Hyndman's England for All, published in 1881, though it was promptly denounced by Marx himself, was a frankly Marxian work, and should, according to Marxist theory, have appealed to the proletariat. Yet Hyndman was labouring against a double disadvantage, for not only was Marxist analysis more readily comprehensible to middle-class intellectuals than to workers. There was also the disadvantage that the middle classes had begun to protest before the working classes had awoken. Therefore Hyndman was virtually foredoomed to gather around him a bourgeois group. Middle-

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1. Elton, Godfrey: England, Arise! London, 1931, p. 40.

class members of the S.D.F. included Ernest Belfort Bax, a philosophical Socialist, Helen Taylor, Mill's step-daughter, the Eton masters H. Salt and J. L. Jones, Edward Aveling and his wife Eleanor Marx, Edward Carpenter, a Cambridge don who was a benevolent sympathiser, and H. H. Champion, a former soldier who held a succession of offices in the S.D.F.

It may have been true, as Godfrey Elton maintains, that the S.D.F. "had flung itself against the almost impregnable ramparts of British Social and political tradition."[1] But it is equally true that by its publication of the pamphlet Socialism made Plain and the weekly Justice, by leading the workers' demonstrations in Trafalgar Square and elsewhere, the S.D.F. brought an awareness of social conditions to the middle and upper classes which had previously been almost totally lacking. It was not only that demonstrations brought a new middle-class awareness of poverty and increases in contributions to the Lord Mayor's Fund for the poor, but also that general social attitudes were in many cases sharply changed. The high proportion of middle-class members made available a relatively large amount of money, ability, and energy, as Henry Pelling points out, and in general the S.D.F. acted as the vanguard and measuring-stick of Socialism,

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

the most extreme manifestation of the anti-Liberal trend. While it did not itself make many converts, it did persuade many to the need of collective enterprise, and correspondingly weakened the Liberal Party and the Liberal tradition. Thus, while convinced Marxians were weak in numbers, the influence of Marx rippled out into a far wider pool than that which contained his direct disciples.

In discussing the Social Democratic Federation we have purposely omitted mention of one of its stellar figures, William Morris. Morris, who had before 1880 already achieved renown as a poet, author, architect, and designer, represents a different element in the rebellion of the middle classes against Liberalism: that of art. Because there were relatively few artists who turned specifically Socialist as did Morris does not mean that the artistic rebellion did not have considerable influence. The adhesion of Morris was a godsend to the infant Socialist movement and a blow to organised Liberalism, for the influence which he possessed was greater than that of any of the other early Social Democrats. Morris as a Socialist was worth far more than almost any other kind of person, for he had a unique position and prestige, and could thus appeal to groups not open to persuasion from other quarters.

Morris had been brought to Socialism partly by reading Mill, but more importantly, as noted above, through the works of Ruskin. After 1880 he became convinced that a completely

new approach was needed to social problems, and inspired by a love of beauty he determined to do his best to achieve a society in which all could appreciate and partake of beauty. "It must be remembered," he wrote in later life, "that civilisation has rendered the workman to such a . . . pitiful existence that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread."[1]

Morris brought to a movement not rich in literary expression an emotional appeal which could hardly have been as well-articulated without him. "He bestowed the torch of gold on British Socialism. His very cry of revolt had a lyric tone."[2] His political career was not a success in ordinary terms of measurement: it was a series of frustrations and defeats. Shortly after he published a joint socialist manifesto with Hyndman, a bitter quarrel rent the S.D.F., and a majority of members, including Morris, seceded to form the Socialist League [1884]. The League, in turn, was from its start torn by dissensions, and by the end of

1. William Morris in How I Became A Socialist, p. 22.

2. Gould, F. J.: Hyndman, London, 1928, p. 75.

the decade had ceased to function. But though Morris's active work thus met with disaster, his influence increased apace. He was not a Marxist in any usual sense of the term [though he did believe in the probability of violent revolution], and in fact declared to a purist questioner: "To speak quite frankly, I do not know what Marx's theory of value is, and I'm damned if I want to know. It is enough political economy for me to know that the idle class is rich and the working class is poor, and that the rich are rich because they rob the poor. That I know because I see it with my own eyes."[1] What fired his Socialist faith was a deep belief in the equality of man and in human brotherhood. This belief, entwined with his love of art and beauty, lent a moral strength and fervour to the socialist cause, a fervour which was enhanced by his writings in Justice and Commonweal, his songs, like "Wake, London Lads", and "All for the Cause", and his books, notably News from Nowhere. Oliver [later Lord] Baldwin says of the latter that it was the most influential book aside from Blatchford's Merrie England to attract people to socialism, and H. N. Brailsford says that it "had an immense influence in turning the minds of the younger generation . . . away from the complacency and philistinism of Victorian commercialism."[2]

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1. Elton, op. cit., p. 61.
2. Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians, London, 1949, p. 304.

Morris said that "fellowship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell."[1] Two quotations from his speeches and writings are apposite here, for they reveal the essence of emotion which lay at the core of his rebellion against Liberalism, and illustrate why Morris could appeal to a group to which Fabian statistics were dull and meaningless and the Marxian dialectic devoid of reality. At a Trafalgar Square riot in ~~November, 1887,~~ February, 1888, a worker named Alfred Linnell was clubbed to death by the police - at his funeral, Morris said: "Our friend who lies here has had a hard life and met with a hard death; and if society had been differently constituted, his life might have been a delightful, a beautiful, and a happy one. It is our business to organise for the purpose of seeing that such things do not happen; to try and make this earth a beautiful and happy place."[2]

In a letter to C. E. Maurice in 1883, he wrote of his disillusion with Liberalism: "I used to think that one might further real Socialistic progress by doing what one could on the lines of ordinary middle-class Radicalism; I have been driven of late into the conclusion that I was mistaken; that Radicalism is on the wrong lines, so to say, and will never develop into anything more than Radicalism; in fact, that it is made for and by the middle classes and will always be

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1. Cole, Margaret: Makers of the Labour Movement, London, 1948, p. 184.

2. Brown, A. Barratt [ed.]: Great Democrats, London, 1934, pp. 498-9.

under the control of rich capitalists; they will have no objection to its political development, if they think they can stop it there; but as to real social changes, they will not allow it if they can help it."[1]

Walter Crane was another artist who was an early member of the S.D.F. and who designed and painted much of value for it and for the Socialist League. After his conversion to Socialism, Crane wrote that he too had been a Radical, but had slowly realised that Radicalism brought in its wake no significant social changes. "For some years I remained what would be called an ordinary political Radical, I clung to the belief that with the extension of the franchise everything could be won. I imagined that the mere removal of political disabilities would at once give power and freedom to poor men, and that they would be enabled to gain all that they deserved.

"Hyde Park railings went down, household suffrage was passed, and the ballot act, but nothing in particular happened.

"Much the same sort of men in the main were returned to Parliament and the political game went on as before. Other men [not members of Parliament] continued to be overworked and underpaid. Misery and squalor remained, want of work, want of food."[2]

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1. Ibid, p. 500.

2. in How I Became a Socialist, p. 24.

The Marxian and artistic rebellions against the manifestations and mores of Gladstonian Liberalism, small but significant, were enhanced by the changes in economic and political philosophy which went on at the same time. At Oxford the political philosopher T. H. Green was conceiving in the early 'eighties a new conception of Liberalism, which in the 'nineties and early years of the new century was carried forward by Bosanquet, Hobhouse, and others. Green was a powerful and influential figure in the early 1880's in socialising the ideas of Liberalism, in undermining the classical conceptions of individualism which had in the past and still did characterise the Liberal Party. Green not only was the first powerful academic exponent of Liberalism as a positive and social force, but was also a great teacher, inspiring men as diverse in their outlooks and careers as Arnold Toynbee, Lord Milner, H. H. Asquith, and Scott Holland. His social concept of Liberalism served as a sanction for the collectivist legislation of the Liberal Government of 1880-85, including the Employers' Liability Act of 1880 and the Irish Land Act of 1881. "If the ideal of true freedom," he said, "is the maximum of power for all members of human society to make the best of themselves, we are right in refusing to ascribe the glory of freedom to a state in which the apparent elevation of the few is founded on the degradation of the many."[1]

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1. Green, T. H.: Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract, London, 1881, p. 10.

Green went on to attack the classic conception of property:

> "Freedom of contract . . . is valuable only as a means to an end. That end is what I call freedom in the positive sense; in other words, the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contribution to a common good. No one has a right to do what he will with his own in such a way as to contravene this end. It is only through the guarantee which society gives him that he has property at all . . . this guarantee is founded on a sense of common interest. Everyone has an interest in securing to everyone else the free use and enjoyment and disposal of his possessions, so long as that freedom on the part of one does not interfere with a like freedom on the part of others, because such freedom contributes to that equal development of the faculties of all which is the highest good for all. This is the true and only justification of the rights of property."[1]

While Green did not propose immediate drastic reforms, the implications of his doctrine struck at the very roots of the basis of Liberalism: the treatment of property as sacred and the opposition to social politics.

In economic thought likewise there was a general rebellion against the dreary rigours of the "laws" of the classical economists. We have spoken above of tendencies among economists [chief among whom was J. S. Mill] in this direction before 1880; after this date there was a greater number of men ready to attack the shibboleths of the past which had by now been clearly outdated. Moreover, those who had queried the bases of pure laissez-faire before 1880 were now listened to with greater respect. Men like Wicksteed,

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Jevons, Sidgwick, J. A. Hobson, John Rae and Arnold Toynbee at various places and in various ways condemned the idle rich and modified the concepts which economists had hitherto held. Many of the economists pointed out the abuses which capitalism had allowed, as for example a speech of Rae's in 1884 in which he said: "in the wealthiest nation in the world, almost every twentieth inhabitant is a pauper . . . . One fifth of the community is insufficiently clad . . ."[1] Perhaps the most influential of the economists was Arnold Toynbee, an Oxford don who, in a manner similar to Green, his own teacher, had many admiring disciples and who unfortunately died in March, 1883, aged thirty-one. In a lecture given shortly before his death Toynbee admitted: "The long and bitter controversy between economists and human beings has ended in the conversion of the economists."[2] Toynbee went on to say that it was now recognised that prosperity had affected only the few and that the state must interfere to help all "who are not free agents", not merely women and children. In another lecture he declared himself an "English Radical Socialist", and said unequivocally that "when individual rights conflict with the interest of the community, there the state ought to interfere."[3]

The influence of the new school of political and economic

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1. Lynd, Helen, op. cit., p. 54.
2. Toynbee, Arnold: Progress and Poverty - A Criticism of Mr. Henry George, London, 1884, p. 7.
3. Toynbee, Arnold: Lectures on the Industrial Revolution, London, 1887, p. 216.

philosophers was not limited to obvious examples like the founding of Toynbee Hall, to be discussed below. It was apparent in a whole new set of attitudes toward social problems which emanated from the universities and affected many ordinary middle-class university graduates. In this way, a new conception of the role of the state was spread through bourgeois society and men who were not themselves socialists contributed to the decline of Liberalism, often without intending to do so. The Fabians, among others, owed much to Cairnes, Wicksteed, and Jevons.[1]

But the outstanding exponent of a new political and economic philosophy was something of a paradox; not an academician or even a Briton, Henry George did more to influence the social thought of the early and middle 1880's than any other single man. His celebrated masterpiece, Progress and Poverty, was first published in the United States in 1879, and even before its appearance in a cheap English edition late in 1881, it had been read and absorbed by many men in public and intellectual life in Britain. With the publication of the British version George's influence became tremendous, and Progress and Poverty was soon "selling as no work on economics had ever sold before."[2] Sixty thousand copies were sold by

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1. Cf. Harold Laski in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians, p. 83.

2. Hutchison, Keith: The Decline and Fall of British Capitalism, New York, 1950, p. 17.

1885. George, a Californian, attacked the "unearned increment" which landowners reaped and advocated a Single Tax on land values as the answer to economic inequalities. As we have seen above, the land question had been a burning issue all over Britain even before 1880, and George's book added a huge amount of fuel to the flames. Soon after its appearance in England there appeared a volume advocating nationalisation of the land by Alfred Russel Wallace, who proceeded to form a society to advocate the same end. Goerge's influence grew apace. In 1881 he arrived in Britain and began at once to lecture and write in advocacy of the Single Tax. Almost no political group could avoid him; John Bright, Frederic Harrison, the Liberal and Conservative Parties joined in attacking him, and in turn succeeded in discrediting themselves with much "advanced" opinion. George had succeeded in awakening men to the social problem; he asked a question which it was difficult to answer and which had been largely ignored by ordinary politicians: "With what intent have human creatures been given capabilities of body and mind which, under conditions that exist in such countries as Great Britain, only a few of them can use and enjoy?"[1] George posed his basic problem thus: "This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of

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1. George, Henry in Nineteenth Century, July, 1884. Goodwin, Michael [ed.]: Nineteenth Century Opinion, Harmondsworth, 1951, pp. 61-2.

our times. It is the central fact from which spring industrial, social and political difficulties which perplex the world . . . . So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent. The reaction must come."[1]

There were few social reformers or socialists in the remaining years of the nineteenth century who remained uninfluenced by the energy and imagination of Henry George. William Morris, the economists, the Fabian Society: organised groups and individual thought were swayed. Of the last mentioned, Edward Pease writes: "To George belongs the extraordinary merit of recognising the right way of social salvation . . . .From Henry George I think it may be taken that the early Fabians learned to associate the new gospel with the old political method."[2] George was emphatically not a Socialist himself; he believed in private ownership, even of the land, and attacked socialism on many occasions. But there can be no doubt as to the influence which his energy and vision came to exercise in a country already torn by divisions over the land problem. Mrs. Lynd writes: "In the 'eighties he furnished an intellectual bridge over which many people passed from individualism to socialism."[3] And

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1. <u>My Apprenticeship</u>, 1926 edition, p. 181.
2. Pease, E. R.: <u>The History of the Fabian Society</u>, London, 1916, pp. 20-21.
3. Lynd, Helen, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 143.

Bernard Shaw says: ". . . My attention was first drawn to political economy as the science of social salvation by Henry George's eloquence, and by his Progress and Poverty, which had an enormous circulation in the early 'eighties, and beyond all question had more to do with the Socialist revival of that period in England than any other book."[1]

In discussing the movement of political and economic philosophy away from Liberalism as the term was then understood, it is worth reiterating that the spokesmen of this movement were not socialists or even necessarily anti-Liberal. Nor did they agree entirely with one another; Professor Sidgwick, for example, stalked away from a meeting in 1888 in great indignation because Bernard Shaw had advocated the nationalisation of land! But the protesters did have in common a tendency to undermine the foundations of the old order and to make their listeners and readers dissatisfied with the two major political parties. Even such an ordinary Liberal M.P. as Samuel Smith, who regarded land nationalisation as a supremely "gigantic piece of wickedness" wrote in 1883 that "the conscience of the community is impersonated in its Government, and I regard with hopefulness the increasing responsibility felt for the care of the weak and helpless."[2]

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1. Pease, op. cit., p. 275.

2. Contemporary Review, December, 1883, pp. 870-1.

Thus the foundations of Gladstonian Liberalism, resting as they did on the political and economic "freedom" of each individual, were slowly being eaten away.

A resurgence of the Christian Socialist movement in the 1880's was another powerful force in the middle-class rebellion against Liberalism. The movement was never approved by a majority either within the Established Church or the Non-conformist Chapels, while within the Catholic Church Cardinal Manning was for long almost the only voice calling for social justice. Manning was always concerned for the material as well as the spiritual well-being of humanity, and in the 'eighties not only supported government aid to the unemployed, to trades unions, and to workers generally, but was an important factor in helping to end the great Dock Strike of 1889 on terms favourable to the dockers. In 1886 he declared: "The state of the houses, families living in single rooms, sometimes many families, in one room, a corner apiece - these things cannot go on. The accumulation of wealth in the land, the piling up of wealth like mountains in the possession of classes or of individuals, cannot go on if these moral conditions of our people are not healed. No commonwealth can rest on such foundations."[1]

Although voices like Manning's were few, however, they grew quickly and became influential. Henry George and

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1. <u>My Apprenticeship</u>, 1926 edition, p. 182.

T. H. Green were religious men, and as if in response to the challenge of George and Green in the secular field a religious movement was re-awakened. As Mrs. Webb says, there was a great trend towards the "transference of the emotion of self-sacrificing service from God to man."[1] One sign that service to both could be combined was the work of "General" William Booth. Booth with the aid of his devoted wife had been working in London's East End since 1865, and late in the seventies founded the Salvation Army. The perhaps excessive religious demonstrations of the Army should not blind observers to the great social work which it performed; as G. M. Trevelyan points out: " . . . the modern evangelists, though by no means ashamed of 'enthusiasm', developed also an earthly paraphernalia of shelters, workshops, and emigration agencies."[2] The Army by its very emphasis on "enthusiasm" soon grouped together a number of selfless volunteers who unceasingly preached the religious and material messages of the Gospels. Especially after the Dock Strike in 1889 and the publication of Booth's _In Darkest England and the Way Out_ in 1890, the Salvation Army concentrated on providing relief of many kinds to the poorer citizens of London. In _Darkest London_, "General" Booth

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1. _Ibid._, 1926 edition, p. 130.

2. Trevelyan, G. M.: _British History in the Nineteenth Century_, London, 1930, p. 404.

emphasised the statistics of depravity and misery in Britain, such as prostitution, drunkenness, the neglect and violence which caused the yearly deaths of many children, the sweaters' dens in which, in London alone, 5,000 children were employed in 1889, the million Londoners in institutions or in dire poverty and many other statistical revelations of the sub-human conditions in which so many people lived. His labours on behalf of the "submerged tenth" were untiring, and though, as he said: "I intensely sympathise with the aspirations that lie behind all these Socialist dreams . . . what these good people want to do, I want also to do,"[1] he was too intensely practical to bother with any grand plan to right Britain's wrongs. He issued a clarion call to all: "There is wealth enough abundantly to minister to [England's] social regeneration so far as wealth can, if there be but heart enough to set about the work in earnest."[2]

Booth's movement had been an offshoot of the Methodist church, which contained many other social-reforming elements. In 1887 the London Methodist Mission was formed by Hugh Price Hughes, an eminent preacher who led the "forward movement" among Methodists for Social reform, and 445 such

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1. Booth, William: In Darkest England and the Way Out, London, 1890, p. 79.

2. Ibid., p. 16.

missions were in existence by 1908. Hughes wrote many stirring articles in the Methodist Times, urging church members not to neglect social problems. There were movements amongst other Nonconformist congregations as well, The Reverend R. W. Dale, a Birmingham Congregationalist preacher, was an early collectivist and, according to Hutchison, helped to inspire much of the initial Radicalism of Joseph Chamberlain, although the latter was a Unitarian. Andrew Mearns, a Congregational Minister, wrote a pamphlet entitled The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, which, thanks in part to the publicising work of W. T. Stead, the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, and son of a Congregational preacher, achieved a widespread renown. In The Bitter Cry, published in 1883, Mearns condemned the poverty and misery of London and wrote: "The flood of sin and misery is gaining on us . . . . The state must interfere and give people the right to live before the Church can have much chance with them."[1] Mearns wrote further articles and carried out investigations; he advocated State officers of health and state aid in caring for the young. Mrs. Lynd writes: "The desires for reform resulting from Mearns's pamphlet, with Stead's publicising of it, was one of the important factors leading to the appointment of the Royal Commission on Housing in 1884 and the Housing Act

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1. Hutchison, op. cit., p. 18.

of 1890."[1] Many other Nonconformist publicists helped to awaken the conscience of the middle classes, such as the Reverend Brooke Lambert, who wrote in 1883: "There is a deep sympathy for the classes doomed to wretched toil, there is growing earnestness to find a remedy."[2] The Unitarian Minister P. H. Wicksteed, as well as being an unorthodox economist, helped John Trevor to begin the Labour Church movement, first established in 1891 in Manchester. Appealing as they did to the working classes, the Labour Churches will be considered more fully in the next chapter, but here it is important to note that the movement was a response made by the middle-class elements in the Unitarian and other churches to working-class needs.

Although the score of years after 1880 witnessed an effusion of Nonconformist social movements, however, the impact of the Church of England itself in the social sphere was undoubtedly even greater. The reason for this situation was twofold. In the first place, the Established Church had long stood as a bastion of privilege and reaction; the days of the Christian Socialists had long since passed, and part of the cause of the Radical agitation against the Church lay in the fact that it was closely interwoven, by birth and connection, into the fabric of the British aristocracy.

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1. Lynd, Helen, _op. cit._, p. 148.

2. _Contemporary Review_, December, 1883, p. 875.

[Even as late as 1926, for example, 38 out of 56 Bishops had been educated at one of the fourteen principal Public Schools.] That social movements should begin in the Church itself, therefore, was a point worth more than the mere numbers who partook in them, for Nonconformists had a Radical tradition and unorthodox activities were not unexpected from that quarter.

Secondly, the force of the social movements in the Church of England was felt chiefly in London. As events in the metropolis are always magnified, the activities of the Church there were stressed and brought before the public eye, particularly as demonstrations and riots and the impact of the New Unionism were all marked in the London of the later 'eighties. Outside of London, notably in Wales and East Anglia, strong Nonconformity produced social movements, but in the capital itself Nonconformism was relatively apathetic or hostile towards social action. This was partly due to the fact that the Free Churches themselves had by now become somewhat settled and staid, partly to the fact that they were reliant on the contributions of individuals, often wealthy individuals [such as Nonconformist businessmen], and could not fall back on large endowments as could the established Church. Moreover, the very Catholicity of the Church of England made possible a breadth of opinion and a freedom for local clergymen which the latter were quick to seize, particularly those few who still bore in memory the teachings of Kingsley and Maurice.

The social conscience of Anglicanism was demonstrated in settlement work and articles in journals, but also in general literature. A sensation of 1888 was Mrs. Humphrey Ward's novel, Robert Elsmere, which discusses the plight of a young clergyman. Torn by the questions of theology, young Robert settles on a non-dogmatic, social Christianity, which leads him to a career of preaching and doing social work in the East End. The aged Gladstone, among others, read Robert Elsmere, and the controversy which it raised was significant of the changed times.

On the clerical side, there were many movements within the Established Church. Although Dr. Temple, Bishop of London, was largely impervious to the social problem, many of his colleagues were not, notably Westcott, Bishop of Durham, who became convinced of the assertion that Christianity must inevitably lead to Socialism. Outstanding among the leaders of the revived Christian Socialist movement was Stewart Headlam, a Bethnal Green curate. In 1877 he founded the Guild of St. Matthew, specifically to carry on the work of Kingsley and Maurice. Despite the opposition of Bishop Temple he continued his work, aiding the poor and rousing in the upper classes a concern for the problems of poverty. Convinced that "the Church is bound by its nature to be Communistic,"[1] Headlam became a Socialist and advocated

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1. Lynd, Helen, op. cit., p. 319.

State action in many fields. He joined the Fabian Society, for which he wrote pamphlets, joined the demonstrations of the S.D.F., and in 1883 with two other parsons, C. L. Marson and W. E. Moll, began to publish the Christian Socialist. Many socialist writers contributed to its pages and it had considerable influence. In 1893 the Guild of St. Matthew had 77 members of the Church clergy among its 283 members, and two years later it had 99 parsons out of 364 members.

Another social mission, the Christian Social Union, was begun in 1889 by the Reverend Scott Holland. Holland had five years earlier set up a settlement known as Oxford House, which did work among the poor and publicised the conditions of life among them. While the Christian Social Union was not as definitely Socialist as the Guild of St. Matthew, it was organised on the same lines and worked for largely the same ends. By 1895 the C.S.U. had 28 branches containing about 2,600 members.

Perhaps the best known of the religious social leaders, outside of "General" Booth, however, was the Reverend Samuel Barnett. Barnett, as we have seen above, had, with his wife, been instrumental in aiding Octavia Hill's Charity Organisation Society, with its laissez-faire precepts. The Barnetts had always a desire to help the poor more directly than the C.O.S. could do, however; in 1884, in memory of Arnold Toynbee, they founded Toynbee Hall which, with Oxford House, was effectively the first religious settlement in Great

Britain. Barnett continued his work at his church of St. Jude's and kept up his connection with the C.O.S. Around 1886, however, both of the Barnetts decided that the methods of the C.O.S. were too superficial to cure the basic ills of society, and broke away from it. Mrs. Webb writes: "They had discovered for themselves that there was a deeper and more continuous evil than unrestricted and unregulated charity, namely, unrestricted and unregulated capitalism and landlordism."[1] Neither of the Barnetts were Socialists in the theoretical definition of the term, but they were both empirical socialists, realising the inadequacy of voluntary charities and seeking to enlist the aid of the State to attack social abuses. They advocated State action to engage in housing programmes, to give universal pensions, to establish recreational and cultural facilities, and generally to ameliorate living conditions of the poor. Moreover, they actively interfered in trade disputes, offering help to strikers which was badly needed.

The result of this vast surge in religious social consciousness in the 1880's and 1890's was further to increase middle-class interest in working-class problems, to make the rich in fact realise that there was no justification for their living in luxury while the many weltered in misery. Canon Barnett accurately diagnosed the problem: "Generally

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1. My Apprenticeship, 1926 edition, p. 207.

it is assumed that the chief change is that to be effected in the habits of the poor . . . . Perhaps it is more to the purpose that a change should be effected in the habits of the rich."[1] Thus the sanction of the clergy was added to the demonstrations of the poor and the social outcasts, and slowly the unheeding began to awaken. While the Socialist and socially-conscious clergy were vastly in the minority, yet, as with Morris, George, and others, the moral and logical appeal to a better life which they manifested prevented them from being merely voices crying in the wilderness and gradually strengthened their appeal. Moreover, by the end of the 'eighties even leaders of the Church were beginning to accept Socialism in a watered-down form.[2]

Thus far in this chapter, in considering the middle-class rebellion against the axioms and shibboleths of Gladstonian Liberalism in its political, economic and social forms, we have discussed four aspects; the Marxian, artistic, philosophical, and religious manifestations. Last, and probably most important, we must consider the great impetus to social change which was induced by the mass of statistical evidence thrust forward before the comfortable classes of the late Victorian years. It is of course impossible to separate

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1. Nineteenth Century, November, 1886, Goodwin, Michael, op. cit., p. 67.

2. See Lynd, op. cit. pp. 324-5.

this statistical and factual material from the other facets of the middle-class challenge discussed above. For example, much of the analysis of economic philosophers was based on the survey of actual conditions and the agitation of the Social Democratic Federation likewise revealed a mass of evidence which, as we shall shortly see, it was impossible to refute. Moreover, the work of the religious missions was equally observational; Reverend Barnett and General Booth were but two of many who dredged up the facts of the miserable life of many Londoners for the edification of the comfortable. As we have seen above, the Reverend Andrew Mearns' pamphlet had a wide circulation and was in part responsible for the Housing Act of 1890.

There was, nevertheless, a contemporaneous movement in middle-class circles in a mainly secular sense to find out the facts, to reveal the conditions of the mass of people and to construct a new system from the debris of the old. "Advanced" elements, among the middle classes, becoming disgusted in the early 'eighties with politics and politicians, turned to the study of society itself; as Mrs. Webb points out:

> "Mr. Gladstone's administration of 1880-1885 . . ., this Ministry of all the talents, wandered in and out of the trenches of the old individualists and the scouting parties of the new Socialists with an 'absence of mind' concerning social and economic questions that became, in the following decades, the characteristic feature of Liberal statesmanship. Hence it was neither in Parliament nor in the Cabinet that the battle of the empirical Socialists with the philosophical Radicals was fought and won. Though the slow but continuous retreat of the

> individualist forces was signalised by annual increments of Socialistic legislation and administration, the controversy was carried out in periodicals, books, and in the evidence and reports of Royal Commissions and Government Committees of Enquiry."[1]

The periodicals of this score of years showed a vast increase in literature on social questions: the _Fortnightly_ and _Contemporary_ reviews, the _Nineteenth Century_ and _Pall Mall Gazette_ among the "respectable" journals were notable for articles on the hitherto neglected subjects of housing, pensions, sweating, low wages, unemployment, and kindred subjects. W. T. Stead of the _Pall Mall Gazette_ and the _Review of Reviews_ was a particularly effective and popular writer. At the same time a huge increase in Government enquiries was apparent; in the 'eighties Royal Commissions on Housing of the Working Classes and on the Great Depression were established, and in the 'nineties Commissions on the Aged Poor and on Labour enabled collectivists to point to masses of facts which justified their theses. Surveys were undertaken such as Rowntree's at the end of the century in York, and similar projects were carried out elsewhere.

All of the articles in the "respectable" journals, all the Royal Commission reports, and all the other surveys, however, were dwarfed by the magnitude of Charles Booth's

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1. _My Apprenticeship_, 1926 edition, p.184.

monumental study, the Life and Labour of the People of London. Booth was a wealthy shipowner of a Liverpool family of Unitarian and Radical traditions. Himself a Tory, Booth nevertheless had an active social conscience and an interest in public affairs; it was thus that he heard with horror and disbelief of the S.D.F.'s declaration that twenty-five per cent of the people of London lived in conditions of unspeakable poverty. Having the means to do so Booth determined on a survey of the whole of London, and entirely at his own expense, aided by a team of research workers which included Beatrice Potter [who was his wife's cousin and who was a few years later to become Mrs. Sidney Webb], he set to the task. The survey, which was begun in 1886, was not finished until the early years of the new century. The first volume was published in 1889, however, and the next two in 1891; altogether, seventeen volumes were published in seventeen years. Their contents shocked middle-class opinion and their reverberations were great. Overnight, Mrs. Webb points out, Londoners were made aware "that as many as thirty per cent of the inhabitants of the richest . . . city in the world lived actually at or beneath the bare level of subsistence. The philanthropist and the politician were confronted with a million men, women and children in London alone, who were existing, at the best, on a family income of under 20s. a week . . . . How had this mass of destitution and chronic poverty arisen during a period of unprecedented

national prosperity?"[1] Booth's own remedies lay in state action to protect the "submerged" elements by means of complete financial and social support and universal, non-contributory old-age pensions. Thus he evolved a scheme which he called "socialism in the arms of individualism". He declared: "Thorough interference on the part of the state with the lives of a small fraction of the population would tend to make it possible ultimately to dispense with any socialistic interference in the lives of all the rest."[2] Without needing to accept his conclusions, the well-to-do classes of London were brought more than ever face to face with the misery and degradation, not to mention the removal of spontaneity and individual initiative which the Industrial Revolution had brought in its wake. It was necessary to realise that the system which boasted of individual freedom had come close virtually to enslaving a very considerable proportion of the people. The service which Booth performed will be readily apparent when one realises the vast amount of knowledge which the survey for the first time made known. Mrs. Webb points out: "Prior to this enquiry, neither the individualist nor the Socialist could state with any approach to accuracy what exactly was the

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1. My Apprenticeship, 1926 edition, pp. 247-8.

2. Briggs, Asa: Signpost to the Welfare State, New Statesman and Nation, February 4, 1956, p. 127.

condition of the people of Great Britain."[1] After it had been made a whole new approach to social problems was necessary. The economic individualism of the time was seriously impugned and Booth's work inspired a whole range of social legislation.

In a recent article Asa Briggs points out: "Only one of the statistics has retained its original vividness for subsequent generations. In the eighteen-nineties 30 per cent of London's population lived in chronic poverty below the level of subsistence [of 30s.]. The plain presentation of this single fact did much to stimulate the growing movement of social reform: the 'arithmetic of woe', as Booth called it, provided the basis for the mathematics of welfare . . . . He made the social survey an indispensable piece of apparatus for the student of society."[2]

Another unavoidable manifestation of social conditions which confronted the middle classes, especially in London, was the struggle for "New Unionism", highlighted by the Dockers' Strike of 1889. This dramatic series of events will be considered at greater length in the next chapter; here it will suffice to point out that the struggles of underprivileged and unorganised workers for unions and better conditions riveted the attention of the industrial and, to

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1. Ibid., 1926 edition, p. 216.

2. Briggs, Asa, op. cit., p. 127.

some extent, the political world. The battle began in 1888 with Annie Besant's leadership of a strike of the lucifer match girls, one of the worst exploited groups of workers in London. Here again we see a middle-class lead being given to the working-classes, for Mrs. Besant, while a popular orator, was not herself of working-class origin, and had virtually begun the strike by an article in The Link, her journal. The strikes of the exploited workers were climaxed in the 1889 Dockers' Strike, which continued for weeks, aided by mounting public sympathy. As the middle-class public became aware of the conditions of life for the dockers, it became more and more sympathetic to their case, and middle-class and religious leaders rallied to the cause. "At the time of the Dock Strike . . . not only Toynbee Hall, but several parish churches in East London opened rooms to the dockers."[1] Sydney Buxton, a scion of a Radical family [which was later to turn Labour] and a Liberal M.P., lent aid to the dockers which disconcerted many in his own party, for his leaders took little heed of the existence of the strike; in public, none at all. "Parliament," Elton says, ". . . exhibited an unmistakable indifference to the whole affair."[2] Writing shortly after the conclusion of the

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1. Lynd, Helen, op. cit., p. 326.

2. Elton, op.cit., pp. 165-6.

strike, Buxton warned his readers: "The labour question is, indeed, still in the crucible; and many comfortable people need perhaps to be reminded that the dock labourers, greatly as their case was fitted to call forth public sympathy, were neither the hardest worked nor the worst paid . . . . The strike proved that the 'East End' was not quite such a God-forsaken, foreigner-ridden refuge of the destitute, as popular imagination had long painted it . . . . Further, the extraordinary public sympathy evoked on the side of the strikers was a novel and most satisfactory feature of the time. The public conscience has been more and more exercised of late years in respect to the 'condition-of-the-people' question. And here was a concrete case, which, forcing itself on public attention, helped to crystallise public opinion in favour of the general principle that men should be paid better wages and work shorter hours, and that whatever pedants might say, business principles should be tempered by humanity, and the higgling of the market as applied to human labour should be kept within bounds. In a word, that profits should be more equitably divided between labour and capital, and the working classes be entitled to live more decent and democratic lives."[1] Unquestionably, the Dockers'

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1. Smith, H. Llewellyh and Nash, Vaughan: The Story of the Dockers' Strike, London, 1890. Introduction by Sydney Buxton, pp. 6-7.

Strike was a factor of great significance in arousing middle-class opinion on labour matters.

It is probable, however, that the greatest single agency in presenting undeniable and irrevocable facts to a shocked public was the most bourgeois of all late nineteenth century Socialist groups, the Fabian Society. The Society, founded in January, 1884, was an offshoot of a group established by a wandering Scottish-American scholar, Thomas Davidson, called the "Fellowship of the New Life". This group met to discuss Henry George, the establishment of utopian communities and other topics, and it was to continue for another fifteen years, though to little effect. The Fabian Society itself was given its name by Frank Podmore, its effective founder; explaining what was to become the celebrated motto, Podmore said: "For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently, when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain, and fruitless."[1]

The nature of the Society took some time to become established; according to Shaw it was at first as revolutionary [at least in theory] as the S.D.F. or the Socialist League, while Pease says that it was always mild and non-

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1. Pease, _op. cit._, p. 39.

violent. In any event, it was several years before it assumed its characteristic form and its more famous members; the "Big Four" of Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, Sidney Olivier and Graham Wallas, joined in late 1884, 1885, 1885 and 1886 respectively. The four men had all been Liberals at one time; indeed, as we shall see, the Fabians were to remain in close liaison with the London Radicals. The reasons for becoming Socialists were roughly the same with all the Fabians; they were influenced by revisionist economics; to some extent, as with Shaw, by Marx; and by the hatred and disgust felt for a society which produced poverty and unemployment instead of regulated prosperity for all. They felt that something was wrong with a society like theirs and bent their intellects [far more than their emotions] to change it. The fact that the leading Fabians were all bourgeois as well as close friends made the Society seem even more like a clique of middle-class intelligentsia.[1]

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1. In their middle-class nature as well as in being the most advanced contemporary bourgeois body of opinion, the Fabians were a latter-day approximation to the Benthamites. The analogy may be overdrawn, but it has a striking validity when one considers the similar nature of the people who formed these groups. In the England of the first Reform Bill, "advanced" thinkers were Radicals in the sense of advocating far-reaching political reforms; extended suffrage, free education, law codification, administrative reforms, laissez-faire, free trade. Too Radical for the Whig contemporaries of Lord Grey, Benthamite principles found a home in the Gladstonian Liberal Party. In the 1880's, however, advanced spirits of the intelligentsia turned to socio-economic reforming, and their theorising found new channels which, it is important to realise, went completely beyond the concepts of Gladstonian Liberalism. The Fabians were the clearest and

From the start the Society as a whole eschewed the methods of the revolutionary groups, despite the actions of a few of its members. It concentrated on lectures and on its publications, a steady stream of which continued from year to year. In 1884 two "tracts" were published, by 1890 the number had jumped to twelve, and by 1900 a stream of from ten to fifteen pamphlets a year was being issued. Their subjects varied with the author and the year; their contents included such diverse subjects as reform of sweating, local government, the eight-hour campaign, poor law reform, land allotments, and general ideological socialism. The "Basis" of the Society, drawn up in 1887, declared that "the Fabian Society consists of Socialists. It therefore aims at the re-organisation of society by the emancipation of land and industrial capital from individual and class ownership and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit."[1] In 1888 the lectures were delivered which were published in the following year as the celebrated Fabian Essays in Socialism. Written by Shaw, Webb, Olivier, Wallas, Annie Besant, William Clarke, and Hubert Bland, the essays achieved an amazing and immediate success, despite the fact that the

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best exponents of this new trend; as Benthamism exceeded and helped to destroy the Whigs, so did the Fabians represent and foster principles which the Liberal Party could not accept.

1. Laidler, Harry: Socio-Economic Movements, New York, 1946, p. 189.

authors were then almost totally unknown, except for the volatile Mrs. Besant. Twenty thousand copies were sold within a year and the sales continued in subsequent years. The essayists demonstrated that it was possible to be a Socialist yet not be a crank or a social outcast; they showed that Socialism was a matter of plain common sense which could be set out in plain language for the edification of the ordinary intelligent man. The essays gave a historical account of political and economic changes; they demonstrated that changes of a collectivist nature had been in fact occurring for years; they pointed out the advantages which socialism would bring to the entire community. They showed the influence mainly of Ruskin and Jevonian economics; any Marxian inspiration was more a theoretical than a practical part of their philosophy. Their aims, Shaw said [sixty years later] were "to rescue Socialism and Communism from the barricades, from the pseudo-democracy of the Party System, from confusion with the traditional heterodoxies of anti-clericalism, individualist anti-State republicanism, and middle-class Bohemian anarchism; in short to make it a constitutional movement in which the most respectable citizens may enlist, without forfeiting the least scrap of their social or spiritual standing."[1]

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1. Shaw, G. B. [ed.]: Fabian Essays, Jubilee Edition, London, 1948, postscript by Shaw, p. 207.

The success of the essays in large part accomplished this Fabian aim of making Socialism "respectable" to the middle class; in any event their ceaseless activities and publications made the Fabians inescapable to the public eye. Certainly the best-known pamphlet was Sidney Webb's Facts for Socialists, first published in 1887 and re-published many times thereafter. Mrs. Cole says that Facts For Socialists was almost as influential as the Fabian Essays themselves in arousing public concern. She says further: "The Fabians were convinced that if only they could put enough facts before the public they would inevitably make Socialists."[1] The Fabian attack was without question entirely bourgeois in nature; it could rally no masses to a clarion call and its coolly reasonable language was not the sort of effort needed to launch a mass movement. Rather, Fabians were intellectuals and fact-seekers almost exclusively; emotion was drowned by a flood of figures about living conditions and other problems.

The activities of the Fabians took a double course; in fact, it is difficult to follow the various lines which their machinations followed. On the one hand, there was a group, though doubtless in a minority, which extended aid to frankly Socialist causes; Shaw and others lectured from

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1. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Cole, June 16, 1955.

S.D.F. platforms and Fabians were present at the establishment of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, though soon excluded except as individual members. Fabian representatives [Shaw and Edward Pease] were also present at the formation of the Labour Party [then the Labour Representation Committee] in 1900 and there was an element in the Society which always advocated that separate political action should be undertaken by the strength of organised labour. Fabians attacked the Liberal Party in journals; Fabians aided militant trades unions, and Webb largely wrote Tom Mann's minority report for the Royal Commission on Labour in 1894. Bland wrote in his essay "The Outlook" in Fabian Essays: "From the eminently business-like Liberal standpoint there is no reason whatever why concessions should not be made to the Socialists at the polling booth so long as none are asked for in the House of Commons."[1] But the reaction must come: Bland foresaw: "Directly we feel ourselves strong enough to have the slightest chance of winning off our own bat we shall be compelled both by principle and inclination to send an eleven to the wickets . . . the immediate result of this inevitable split will be the formation of a definitely Socialist party . . . . Then the House of Commons will begin

1. Bland in Fabian Essays, p. 201.

dimly to reflect the real condition of the nation outside; and in it we shall see as in a glass, darkly, or smudgedly, something of that 'well defined confrontation of rich and poor' of which all who attend Socialist lectures hear so much, and to which, ex hypothesi, the world, day by day, draws nearer." Radicalism is at an end, for the Radical will be absorbed "into the definitely pro-private capital party on the one side, and the definitely anti-private capital party on the other."[1]

Shaw pursued an extremely equivocal line during the entire period; in the early 'nineties he urged the formation of a forthright Labour Party and in To Your Tents, Oh Israel! [which appeared in the Fortnightly Review of November, 1893, as "by the Fabian Society"] he bitterly condemned the Liberals and advocated independent labour action. In the article Shaw [who was aided by the Webbs in writing it] spoke of the opportunities which the Liberals had neglected and how they had forgotten their fine words and programmes. He wrote: "Pending the formation of a Labour Party, the working classes need not greatly care which party divides the loaves and fishes . . . . The fact that in a House of Commons governing a country where four out of every five are wage earners, only fifteen out of 670 are Labour members is altogether disgraceful to our great Labour organisations."[2] In the tract which soon

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1. Ibid., p. 202, p. 203.

2. Fortnightly Review, vol. 54, November, 1893, pp. 583, 587.

followed, Shaw added detailed suggestions of ways in which the labour movement could politically organise. In the article, moreover, he went further and claimed that the Fabians had all along been advocating independent labour political action: "The Fabian Society . . . can afford to keep its temper, being in a position to prove that it was too wise before the event to be among the dupes. In the various editions of its Workers' Political Program [1887-91], in the Fabian essay entitled The Political Outlook [1889], and in the Fabian Manifesto for the General Election of 1892, ample warning will be found as to what was to be expected."[1] Shaw admitted that, faute de mieux, Fabians had supported the Liberals in 1892: "Then, on the eve of the election, it was too late to do anything but tell the workers that since they were not ready to take the field themselves, they had better do the best they could with the Newcastle Programme . . . ."[2] But there had been a change. "Now there is time for action . . . . Those who are superstitiously afraid of 'splitting the Liberal vote' may comfort themselves with the reflection that no harm can be done by that in attacking a 'safe Tory seat', in which category the throwing over of the Newcastle Programme has practically placed the whole country for the next election . . . . 'Do not hesitate to split' will most

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1. Ibid., p. 585.

2. Ibid., p. 585

assuredly be a Labour watchword for some years to come."[1]

On the other hand, however, the Fabians for many years pursued their policy of "permeation", convinced that the "inevitability of gradualness" could operate in all parties alike. The purpose of this approach was to ensure that collectivist ideas would slowly seep into the mainstreams of political life. It was thus under the cover of "permeation" that Webb wrote reports for the orthodox trade unionist, Henry Broadhurst, at the same time as for his rival, Tom Mann. Both parties, the Conservative as much or more than the Liberal, had accepted the need for factory legislation, for Housing Acts, Employers' Liability, and other measures of a similar nature. Sidney Webb was perhaps the outstanding exponent of the "permeation" philosophy among the Fabians, and after his marriage in 1892 to Beatrice Potter, daughter of an upper-middle-class family, he possessed far more contacts than he had previously held. Nor was Webb above a desire to play the _éminence grise_ of political life. The Webbs were friends of prominent Liberals like R. B. Haldane and John Morley; they were friendly also with A. J. Balfour, and hoped to work through Joseph Chamberlain. In London the Fabians generally and Webb in particular worked with the Liberals after the formation of the London County Council by

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1. _Ibid._, pp. 586-7.

the County Councils Act of 1888. Fabian ideas and Radical forces coalesced to form the Progressive party on the L.C.C., which ran London along largely Fabian lines of "municipal socialism" aided by the radicalism of J. F. B. Firth, until the triumph of the conservative "Moderates" in 1907. Encouraged by their London successes and perhaps misled by the Radical character of the London Liberals, the Fabians tried to make contacts on the national scale and were in part responsible for the Radical nature of the 1891 Newcastle Programme. As John Parker points out: "They had hopes of being able to transform into a Socialist Party the Liberal Party . . . . The acceptance by the Liberals of the Newcastle Programme in 1891 and the adoption as Liberal candidates of many members of the Fabian Society held out hopes that such a change might be effected."[1] While Shaw's claim to have foisted the Programme upon the Liberals almost single-handed must be accepted with a heavy discount for the exuberance of Shavian facetiousness, nevertheless there can be no doubt that the Fabians did influence Radical policy.[2] Shaw and H. W. Massingham went into journalism; the former "collared" the Star as its music critic, while the latter became the assistant editor of the News Chronicle. "Soon," Shaw relates,

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1. Parker, John: Labour Marches On, Harmondsworth, 1947, p.16

2. For Fabian influence in the adopting of the Newcastle Programme, see Ch. 5.

"even the Daily News began to stammer most ineptly in the new tongue."[1] Shaw, who in November, 1893, so enthusiastically enunciated the battle-cry of independent labour action, had but a year before written to the Bradford Workman's Times: "What can we do but laugh at your folly? . . . . The only vital difference between the Fabian Society and the S.D.F. is that the Fabian wants to grow the plums first, and make the pies afterwards, whilst the Federation wants to make the pies first and find the plums afterwards. This is also the idea of the Independent Labour Party, which thus turns out to be nothing but an attempt to begin the S.D.F. over again."[2] At the I.L.P. inaugural meeting, early in 1893, Shaw stated that he " . . . was on the Executive of a Liberal Association, and had taken some trouble to get the position in order to push labour interests there. He intended to stick to it, and most of the energetic men whom he knew in London had done the same thing, and had found that there was a great deal of good to be done thereby."[3] Even after the founding of the Labour Representation Committee, in 1900, the Fabians were still intent on permeation; Webb was active in Liberal politics long after the turn of the century and was partly instrumental in fostering

1. Fortnightly Review, November, 1893, p. 573.

2. Pelling, op. cit., p. 120.

3. Ibid., p. 127.

the Conservative Balfour Education Act of 1902. Finally, the Fabians long misjudged and scorned the rising Labour leaders, notably Keir Hardie.

It is not the function of this thesis to condone or condemn the Fabians for this two-sided policy of independent labour action and "permeation". What is important here is to point out the fact that the permeative tactics had almost as much influence in causing the Liberal decline, perhaps more, than had the sporadic Fabian moves on behalf of independent labour. For one thing, the collectivist influence of the Webbs tended deeply to divide the Liberals. Some of them, like Acland, Buxton, Haldane, and to some extent Asquith, were open to Fabian suggestions; some were even Fabians themselves. Others who, like John Morley, were far from being collectivist, were friendly with the Webbs and were influenced by them. The Fabian majority which supported the Boer War also supported the Liberal Imperialists and further divided the Liberal Party. It seems clear that the Fabian influence was mostly ineffective as far as Liberal _action_ was concerned; for example, the Newcastle programme was largely unfulfilled, since the 1892-5 Liberal Government was very loath to take collectivist action. Then in the long years of Liberal opposition the Webbs' participation in intrigues and cabals further impeded chances for Liberal harmony. On December 18, 1901, for example, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal leader, wrote to a correspondent about a recent speech of Lord Rosebery's: "All

that he said about the clean slate and efficiency was in an affront to Liberalism and was pure claptrap . . . . This is all a mere rechauffé of Mr. Sidney Webb, who is evidently the chief instructor of the whole faction."[1]

Furthermore, even the Webbs themselves slowly realised the uselessness of trying to influence the Liberals. In 1895, Mrs. Webb told her diary: "Two years ago we hoped not only to go on levelling up the great body of Liberals, but also to weed out of the party, by a reasonable and discriminating Labour policy, the reactionaries . . . . But directly we discovered the ruck-up of official Liberalism . . . we saw plainly that our game was up; . . . . Those who form the backbone of the Liberal Party, who dominate the party machinery, who own the wealth, who to a large extent monopolise the intelligence, have no convictions on the questions that interest working-men. At the best they are timid empiricists, who if they are assured that collectivism is the coming creed give it a faint-hearted support. For the most part they are secretly hostile . . . . These men would rather see a Conservative Government in power than allow the leaders of their own side to push forward social democracy . . ."[2]

In 1901, Sidney Webb wrote a then-famous article for the Nineteenth Century, entitled "Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch". While it still attempted to organise the

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1. Halévy, Elie: History of the English People, 1895-1905, Penguin Edition, Book One, Harmondsworth, 1939, p. 170n.

2. Webb, Beatrice: "Our Partnership," London, 1948, pp. 127-8.

Liberals on a collectivist basis, that is, to "permeate", it contained a clear denunciation of past Liberal policy, so clear and so direct that it deserves extensive quotation here. "What then is the matter with the Liberals?" Webb asked.

> "For fifty years in the middle of the last century, we may recognise their party as a great instrument of progress; wrenching away the shackles - political, fiscal, legal, theological, and social - that hindered individual advancement. The shackles are by no means wholly got rid of, but the political force of this old Liberalism is spent. During the last twenty years its aspirations and its watchwords, its ideas of daily life and its conceptions of the universe, have become increasingly distasteful to the ordinary citizen . . . . Its worship of individual liberty evokes no enthusiasm. Its reliance on 'freedom of contract and 'supply and demand' with its corresponding 'voluntaryism' in religion and philanthropy, now seem to work out distastefully for the masses, who are too poor to have what the economists call an 'effective demand' for even the minimum conditions of physical and mental health necessary to national well-being . . . . The impotency of the Liberal Party as an instrument either of opposition or of government dates from much further back than the Boer ultimatum . . . . The smashing defeat of 1895 was only the culmination of a steady alienation from Liberalism of the great centres of population, which began to be visible even in 1874 . . . . The answer is that, during the last twenty or thirty years, we have become a new people. 'Early Victorian' England now lies, in effect, generations behind us . . . . The historians will recognize, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the birth of another new England[1]. . . . We have become aware, almost in a flash, that we are not merely individuals, but members of a community . . . . We can now see that the rise of the organised Socialist movement in England after 1880 was only one symptom of the political change of heart which the nation was experiencing. Just for that reason the propaganda of practical Socialism has, during the last twenty years, had a great effect on English thought."[2]

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1. Emphasis added.

2. Webb, Sidney in Nineteenth Century, September, 1901, pp. 366-73.

This chapter has indicated some of the main forces which impelled middle-class opinion to abandon traditional Liberalism. Even so laissez-faire a Radical as Auberon Herbert was forced to realise that "Socialism has become the largest fact in the world and has altered all other values."[1] While it is difficult to separate each strand there seem to have been five main groupings into which the challenge flowed: Marxist, artistic, philosophic, religious, and statistical or observational. These strands together caused a great change in middle-class thinking, a change which was more pronounced in the 'eighties than in the decade which followed. In the 'nineties less new evidence was dredged up and fewer startling demonstrations took place, but the process continued and became more pronounced after the turn of the century.

There was at the same time a great working-class awakening to the wrongs of the capitalist system, an awakening which was clearly and closely connected to the middle-class challenge, with which it had many points of contact. It was in fact the revolt of the workers which often brought social problems to the attention of the middle classes. To the working-class challenge, then, we now turn.

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1. Herbert, Auberon, op. cit., p. 187.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHALLENGE OF THE WORKING CLASSES, 1880-1900

There was no sudden and dramatic revolt of a downtrodden proletariat in Great Britain; quite the contrary. In fact, as indicated above, the middle-class challenge to the Liberal Party arose long before that of the working classes, and this reticence of the workers was a factor of great significance in the early impotence of the Social Democratic Federation. The decline of the Chartist Movement had left Socialist and even advanced Radical trade unionism discredited among almost all sections of the working classes, and the New Model Unionism of subsequent years, led by the governing "Junta", was to be mild and conservative in nature. Although there were strikes, they were mostly on a small scale and usually directed against particular firms, not on an industry-wide basis. The "old" unions were composed almost entirely of the aristocracy of labour, skilled craftsmen and highly technical workers who had, apparently, but little interest in combining with their brethren in poorer-skilled and poorer-paid occupations. As Francis Williams says: "The very fact of the large non-industrial benefits they offered to their members put their subscription rates at a level far beyond the reach of any but the better-paid workers."[1] Taken as a whole, the six years from

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1. Williams, Francis: Fifty Years March, London, 1950, p. 39.

1880 to 1885 were years of extreme quiescence, of near-docility on the part of the working classes and the trades unions, partly due to the depression and the drop in union membership which followed it. Thus in 1885 T. H. S. Escott could write of the English working-man: "Tenacious of his own rights, he is the last person in the world to deny the possession of rights to his employer . . . . The fact is that the British working-man, however energetically the attempt may be made to lash him up into revolutionary fervour, cannot divest himself of the conservative instincts of his race. He may be liberal, or radical, or even democratic [sic!]; but so long as the shoe does not pinch he has no wish to change it for another which perhaps will."[1]

This view, held by a Radical middle-class observer, was quite common and was, in fact, shared by most thoughtful working-men themselves. Some have argued that the proponents of the Old Unionism were just as eager for independent labour action as were the advocates of the New, but that they were more expedient and feared defeat if they broke away from the two major parties. A more logical view is that, before 1885, most working people were quite genuinely enamoured of and convinced by the economic and political fetishes of their age. While working men voted for both the two major parties, the

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1. Escott, T. H. S.: England: Its People, Polity and Pursuits, London, 1885, pp. 134-5.

bulk of them and almost all of their leaders were staunch Liberals. With the exception of the Lancashire Cotton Spinners, no union of importance was led by men who favoured Conservatism. This almost exclusive attachment to the Liberal Party was the product of several factors; for one thing it was due to the fact that the workers felt a sense of allegiance to the party which was supposed to be the more progressive of the two and which made more of a direct appeal to working-class votes. The fact that the Conservatives were officially responsible for repealing the Corn Laws, extending the franchise, passing housing acts and other measures of social welfare, and liberalising legislation pertaining to unions made little difference to the organised workers, who drew closer to the Liberal Party in the early 'eighties than ever before. Moreover, the transcendant personality of Gladstone exercised an almost hypnotic influence over working men. Gladstone, as we have seen, favoured the political emancipation of the working-classes and had a genuine feeling for them; in return the articulate workers virtually hero-worshipped him; as Lord Snell, an early Socialist, observes: "The influence of Gladstone among trade unionists was unprecedented and apparently unassailable; what he wanted they too wanted; what he hated they despised. He was the creator, inspirer, and chief bulwark of Liberal-Labourism."[1] Max Beer says: "Gladstone

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1. Snell, Harry [Lord]: Men, Movements, and Myself, London, 1936, p. 139.

. . . was the most potent personal force of Liberal-Labourism. His influence among the trade unionists was amazing . . ."[1] In fact, Gladstone inspired the working classes with a feeling of virtue and strength in themselves, with belief in a maximum of individual freedom and "self-help", and scorn for those who would rely upon the state to effect changes which working-men could best achieve unaided. Moreover, the union leaders felt that many of the changes for which Socialists were beginning to agitate were positively harmful and dangerous. Henry Broadhurst, for years a Liberal-Labour M.P. and Secretary of the Trades Union Congress executive body, the Parliamentary Committee, was a strong foe of socialism and a believer in "individualism". According to a newspaper report of an 1887 speech of his to the T.U.C., Broadhurst asked: "What would be the good of unions if they gave their duties over to Parliament? . . . . For God's sake, let them do this work themselves and not go grovelling to the doors of Parliament like paupers seeking a weekly dole."[2]

The allegiance of the leading unionists to the Liberal Party was strengthened by the fact that the majority of the working class leadership was Nonconformist; as the Free Churches were one of the bulwarks of the Liberal Party,

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1. Beer, Max: A History of British Socialism, vol. 2, London, 1925, p. 197.

2. Hobsbawm, Eric J. [Ed.]: Labour's Turning Point, London, 1948, p. 135.

there was a powerful impetus toward support from the unions for the Liberals, specially in areas like Wales and South-West England, where the Nonconformists were strong. Another source of support for the Liberals lay in the absence of protest from the bottom strata of workers against their treatment by the labour autocrats. As Mrs. Lynd points out: "At the bottom the harrassments of keeping alive sapped energies that might otherwise have gone into militancy and innovation."[1] This condition was emphasised by the advent of the Great Depression, before which working-class organisation, agitation, and strikes had been mounting. Henry Pelling argues: "It is clear that the immediate onset of what economic historians now call the 'Great Depression', so far from encouraging Socialism and the break-up of the Liberal Party, actually discouraged working-class militance and destroyed the 'advanced' elements then in existence."[2]

Thus in the early 1880's the quiescence of the labour "movement" was marked. One sign of the times was the appearance in 1885 of a volume called The New Liberal Programme, to which several Liberal-Labour Members of Parliament contributed, including George Howell, Thomas Burt, and Ben Pickard. Coming out at the same time as Joseph

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1. Lynd, Helen: England in the Eighteen-Eighties, New York, 1945, p. 238.

2. Pelling, Henry: The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900, London, 1954, p. 6.

Chamberlain's Radical Programme, [which we shall consider more fully later], the two works may be justly compared; of the trade unionists, Cole and Postgate comment: " . . Not one of them had a single measure of an even remotely socialistic character to suggest . . . . Their views were not in advance of Chamberlain's; they were an immense way behind."[1] The Webbs comment: "The manifestoes and published memoranda of the Parliamentary Committee during these years do not differ either in tone or in substance from the speeches and articles in which Chamberlain and other Radical capitalists were propounding a programme of individualist Radicalism. In fact, the draft Address to the workmen of the United Kingdom, which the Parliamentary Committee, in anticipation of the General Election, submitted to the Congress of 1885, fell far short of Chamberlain's 'unauthorised programme'."[2] Nothing was said in the draft address about rent and interest, let alone Chamberlainian "ransom", nor about Payment of Election Expenses, Payment of Members [though these two points had been endorsed by the T.U.C. itself], nor Free Education.

The Parliamentary Committee had not adopted the campaign for an extended franchise until after the Liberals had proposed it in the 1880 election, and manhood suffrage was opposed at the

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1. Cole, G. D. H. and Postgate, Raymond: The Common People, 1746-1946, London, 1949, p. 411

2. Webb, Beatrice and Sidney: The History of Trade Unionism, 1666-1920, London, 1920, p. 373.

Congress as late as 1882 and 1883 by large majorities. The Committee, moreover, refused to discuss industrial matters at all, regarding them as outside the T.U.C. sphere, and thus the question of extended organisation, to take one instance, was never even allowed to arise.

The T.U.C. was advised by a middle-class group including A. J. Mundella and Professor Beesly, and was quite content to agitate, under this guidance, for mere "practical" legislation like the trade union Act of 1875, rather than for far-reaching reforms. It is no wonder that when in 1882 Broadhurst attended a continental workingmen's conference he castigated it for considering theory rather than "practical" reforms and said that little co-operation could be undertaken with continental labour groups until they had reached the "advanced" state of organisation prevailing in Great Britain-at a time when only 10 per cent of British male workers were organised.[1]

The early 'eighties witnessed the growth and success of the Liberal-Labour movement, which in fact reached its height during the 1880-1900 period. The Old Union leaders were not altogether enthusiastic about Labour Representation, but in order to pacify the militants and adequately to safeguard their interests they agreed to put forward a few candidates sponsored by the Liberal Party and agreeing to work with the Liberals. Earlier, before the Great Depression, a movement for independent labour candidates had had considerable vogue; the Labour Representation League, set up by the Trades Union Congress

in 1869, the year after its formation, had collapsed in 1881, but not before it had worked for the election of Alexander Macdonald and Thomas Burt in 1874 and helped to aid Henry Broadhurst to their side in 1880. The three men as Members of Parliament were Radicals, but docile in the extreme; Macdonald alone showed any independence in sponsoring a children's hours act before his death in 1881. The only other measure which excited the interest of the T.U.C. and its parliamentary representatives was the Employers' Liability Act of 1880, for which they fought hard. The Webbs say: " . . . The resolutions of the Trades Union Congress on questions of general politics between 1880 and 1884 were successfully pressed on the Legislature only in so far as they happened to coincide with the proposals of the Liberal Party."[1]

Despite the relative inactivity of the Liberal-Labour members, however, the coalition of labour politics with the Liberal Party became more and more pronounced in the years following 1880. The Liberal national leaders grew increasingly favourable to the idea of labour representation, an idea accepted not only by Social Radicals but by Mr. Gladstone himself. The death of the L.R.L. in 1881 was no deterrent to the growth of the "Lib-Labs", as they were beginning to be

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1. Webb, Beatrice and Sidney: <u>The History of Trade Unionism, 1666-1920</u>, London, 1920, p. 373.

called, and in the Election of 1885 no fewer than eleven of them were returned. The eleven, who contained six miners, included Broadhurst and Burt, Joseph Arch of the Agricultural Labourers' Union, W. Randall Cremer, and William Abraham, better known in his native Rhondda Valley as "Mabon", the Bard. Of the Lib-Labs only Abraham was opposed by a Liberal, while of six unsuccessful Lib-Labs four were opposed by Liberals. The significance of this result is apparent; the Liberals were prepared benevolently to sponsor a few Labour candidates, but only a very few, and those were to be kept firmly in hand.

The success of the Lib-Labs emphasised the failure of independent Radicals and Socialists in this election. Of Radical non-Liberal organisations only the Scottish Crofters elected candidates, Dr. G. B. Clark and Dr. R. MacDonald, in straight fights against Liberals, while several of that group were defeated. The S.D.F. put forward three candidates John Burns, in West Nottingham, polled a fairly respectable 598 votes, but Jack Williams and John Fielding in Hampstead and Kennington received no more than 27 and 32 votes respectively. Discredited by the charge of "Tory gold" and humiliated by these failures, the S.D.F. looked to be fast disappearing from political life. A London group, the Labour Emancipation League, composed of workers and formed in 1881 had joined the S.D.F. in 1884, but its membership and influence were small. Moreover, at the T.U.C. conference

conservatism carried the day. A proposal for land nationalisation was carried in 1882, but this vote came to nothing, and the eight hours movement could gather but little support. Fewer than half a million trade unionists were represented at the T.U.C. and these cared little about politics. Sporadic agitation was carried on for a militant labour political policy, but it was met with the dead weight of apathy and continually defeated.

Beneath the apparent supremacy of trade union and general working-class apathy and conservatism, however, beneath the growth of Liberal-Labourism, the rumblings of discontent were beginning to sound. The working-classes did not forget that there was a Liberal Government in the years 1880-1885, nor the discredit which, as we shall see, that Government earned. The Webbs point out: "A Liberal Government was actually in power, wielding an enormous majority, but manifesting no keen desire to remedy the wrongs of economic inequality. . . . A further extension of the Franchise, Free Trade, and Popular Education were still the only social and economic panaceas that the Liberal Party had to offer. But cheapness of commodities was of no use to the workman who was thrown out of employment; and the spread of education served but to increase his discontent with existing social conditions and his ability to understand the theoretic explanations and practical proposals of the

new school of reformers."[1] They add: "If we had to assign to any one event the starting of the new current of thought, we should name the wide circulation in Great Britain of Henry George's Progress and Poverty during the years 1880-1882."[2]

The beginnings of working-class demonstrations were launched in September, 1885, by meetings in Dod Street, a narrow way in Limehouse in the East End of London where the Social Democratic Federation and various other organisations were wont to meet. William Morris, Hyndman, Stewart Headlam, Shaw, John Burns, then a young engineer, and others spoke to crowds of the unemployed, rousing sentiment and attacking the capitalist system. The police forbade these meetings, arrested Headlam, Burns, Morris, Shaw, and Hyndman, and fined Jack Williams, a working-class member of the S.D.F. and a Parliamentary candidate in Hampstead, forty shillings. Upon Williams' refusal to pay he was put in prison for a month and thus succeeded in becoming something of a hero. The S.D.F. then experienced its first real victory when, after a great demonstration the following week, the Dod Street meetings were allowed to continue.

With the renewed outbreak of depression in 1886, demonstrations multiplied. Radical groups, the Fair Trade League,

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1. Ibid., pp. 382-3.

2. Ibid., p. 375.

others fought for the adherence of the discontented, the climax coming at a meeting in Trafalgar Square on February 8, 1886. The S.D.F. competed successfully against the Fair Trade League and various Radical groups, and John Burns was by far the most forceful speaker. Following the meeting Burns and Hyndman led a march to Hyde Park, and there followed a now-celebrated incident. From the windows of the clubs in Pall Mall shoes or old clothes were thrown, possibly by the servants in the clubs. As Francis Williams says: "The unemployed had stood much. They were not ready to stand the taunts and alughter of the rich and well fed . . . "[1] Bricks and paving-stones, left from repair work, were hurled back at the windows of the Clubs, and looting followed in South Audley Street and adjacent parts of the West End. The looting was not the work of the S.D.F., but it received the brunt of the blame for it, and public opinion was harshly condemnatory. The responsible trade unions denounced it and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers disclaimed Burns. But the results of "Black Monday" were more far-reaching and more successful than had at first been thought. Burns, Hyndman, H. H. Champion and Williams were arrested, but in stirring speeches - especially Burns', which was published and widely distributed by the S.D.F. as The Man With the Red Flag - the defendants stoutly upheld their actions and denounced a system which

1. Williams, Francis, op. cit., p. 57.

could countenance the evil of mass unemployment and misery cheek by jowl with unearned and unparalleled wealth. Burns declared: "We are not responsible for the riots; it is Society that is responsible, and instead of the Attorney General drawing up indictments against us, he should be drawing up indictments against Society, which is responsible for neglecting the means at its command . . . . Well-fed men never revolt. Poverty-stricken men have all to gain, and nothing to lose by riot and revolution . . . Riot it was not, it was nothing more or less than honest poverty knocking at the door of selfish luxury and comfort . . ."[1] In the speech Burns condemned the Liberal Government of the day, then immersed in the Home Rule Bill, as strongly as the Tories, and specifically named Gladstone and Chamberlain as "not susceptible to reason or appeals . . ."[2] "It is true," Burns went on, "Mr. Chamberlain denied prior to the riots that exceptional distress prevailed; but about a fortnight afterwards he admitted that it was exceptional and severe, and he actually sent round a circular to the Board of Guardians who partially adopted our proposals such as having unskilled labour on sewage farms."[3] Acquittal of the S.D.F. leaders followed, and even more surprisingly, the Mansion House Fund

1. Burns, John: The Man with the Red Flag, London, 1886, p. 14, p. 15, p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

3. Ibid., p. 16.

for the unemployed rose within four days from £3,000 to over £20,000.[1]

Throughout the remainder of 1886 and 1887 Socialist and Radical demonstrations continued in London, despite the opposition of the new Commissioner of Police, Sir Charles Warren. Demonstrations by the unemployed occurred in churches against sanctimonious preachers, notably in St. Paul's Cathedral, and in the autumn of 1887 many more meetings were held in Trafalgar Square, despite a police ban. Sir Charles Warren then forbade a meeting scheduled to be held on Sunday, November 13, but the Socialist chiefs, now aided by R. B. Cunninghame Graham, a Scottish laird returned to the House of Commons in 1886, decided to defy the ban. Francis Williams describes the day thus: "All the Thames bridges were garrisoned in order to beat back the great contingents marching from Sputh London. Trafalgar Square itself was cordoned off and the Life Guards posted ready to go into action. The picture was one almost of preparations for civil war - an indication of the extent to which the S.D.F. and its allies had aroused and frightened the country. Most of the marchers were driven back before they could reach the Square and many were wounded. But one contingent from North London managed to reach the Square . . . . There they were mercilessly attacked by the police. Cunninghame Graham was beaten to the

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1. Figures are likely to vary; F. S. Gould in his biography of Hyndman says that it rose within 48 hours to over £70,000.

ground, bleeding profusely, and John Burns was also wounded badly."[1] Many people were injured and several were arrested; Cunninghame Graham, despite legal defence undertaken by the young H. H. Asquith, was sentenced to six weeks imprisonment. This day, ever after known to Socialists as "Bloody Sunday", was followed by another clash with the police in February, 1888, at which a young workman, Alfred Linnell, was killed. Although the demonstrations had already seen much violence, Linnell's death was the first to be suffered, and it was made a cause célèbre by the S.D.F.

The return of prosperity and the obvious inability of the S.D.F., the Socialist League, or other socialist groups to capitalise on riots to effect revolution made for a quieter scene, and after 1887 there were few demonstrations or marches. The turmoil of the preceding two years had had its effect, however, for not only the middle classes but also the workers were now at last awakening from apathy and beginning to demand some form of social rights. The fact that Radical Clubs had joined with the Socialists in their demonstrations did not prevent the working classes from condemning the capitalist system "root and branch", as a few militants were now beginning to do. Moreover, the defection of Chamberlain over the Home Rule issue and Dilke's implication in a divorce suit, as we have already seen, removed from

1. Williams, op. cit., p. 61.

the Liberal Party its strongest bastion of the new force of Social Radicalism. Radical elements remained in the Liberal Party, to be sure, especially in London, but they had no longer the dynamic motive force or the personal popularity of Chamberlain. Thus the Liberal catastrophe of 1886 served to weaken that party and to strengthen the force of a more extreme Social Radicalism than Chamberlain's.

It is again important to bear in mind, however, that the Socialist working-class movement did not in this period move forward with an ever-greater force. Progress was slow and jerky; not only was the accretion of strength to socialism uneven, but at the same time Liberal-Labourism also gained strength and recognition from the Liberal Party, as seen in the appointment of Henry Broadhurst as under-secretary to the Home Office during the short-lived Liberal Government of 1886. In the ensuing election of 1886 the eleven Lib-Labs were reduced to nine, though Dr. Clark kept his seat and Cunninghame Graham was elected in Lanarkshire. National Liberal leaders like Herbert Gladstone, Francis Schnadhorst and John Morley, however, acknowledged publicly the need for working-class M.P.'s. As to the trade unionists themselves, Snell says: "The Gladstonian hold over the trade union leaders was increased by the method of control by favour and by appointment. In this Gladstone merely continued what others had begun, but the effect of the appointment of Henry Broadhurst in 1886 to . . . ministerial

position was to harness to the Liberal machine the whole of the trade union movement. A certain number of working-class leaders were to be assisted to enter Parliament as supporters of the Liberal Party, and nearly every trade union leader of the time promptly held out his hand and said: 'Here am I; send me.'"[1]

The attitude of the union leaders could be seen at the T.U.C. conferences between 1885 and 1890. At the 1885 congress, a motion proposing Trade Union candidates to Parliament and welcoming union financial support was carried unanimously, though nothing was at that time done about it. In 1886, however, T. R. Threlfall moved and carried a resolution calling for a Labour Electoral Committee, the idea being to support labour candidates, if possible with union financial backing. Threlfall was at this time a Socialist and a member of the S.D.F.: as such he favoured labour independence and a separate labour programme. At first he was opposed by the old unionists and the Lib-Labs, but quickly the Labour Electoral Association [as it was called after 1887] became more mild and relied heavily on Liberal support. While there was a considerable amount of local autonomy, Threlfall generally influenced the L.E.A.'s activities, always towards working with the Liberals, and opposed independent labour action. The activities of the L.E.A. met with approval from

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1. Snell, Harry, op. cit., p. 139.

national Liberal leaders, but such was not the case in the constituencies. There the middle-class officials did not realise how mild and laissez-faire-ish the trade unionists were, or if they did, refused nevertheless to enter wholeheartedly into alliances with labour. This myopia was to cost the Liberals dear; as Mrs. Cole points out: "The shortsightedness of the Liberal Party is really amazing; with the unions in such respectful mood and the thinking workers so nearly at one with what they believed to be the policy of Liberalism, the Liberals could probably have postponed the creation of a Labour party . . . for many years."[1]

The middle-class elements which controlled the local Liberal caucuses refused almost unanimously to accept the advice or heed the pleas of their national leadership, which realised and regretted this situation. But in the circumstances they were powerless, and time after time they lost promising labour adherents. Almost all of the men who were later to become prominent independent labour leaders - Tillett, Burns, Mann, Snowden, MacDonald, Lansbury, Henderson, Jowett - had been Liberals orignally and were forced to "go independent" because of the Liberal attitude. It is true that many of the rising labour men [Lansbury, for example, who wrote of Gladstone: "No beginning of a comprehension of our wishes seemed

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1. Cole, Margaret; Makers of the Labour Movement, London, 1948, pp. 209-10.

to penetrate to the great man's mind."[1]] steadily grew more and more suspicious of Liberal policy, but had the Liberals shown more of an inclination to work with Labour, their fears might have been allayed almost indefinitely. Figuratively speaking, and in Lansbury's case literally, the labour men did not jump away from Liberalism; they were pushed.[2]

The most notable example of the Liberal attitude was in Mid-Lanark, where middle-class Liberal intransigeance met the formidable obstacle of James Keir Hardie. Hardie, who was born in 1856 and had suffered through years of early childhood working in a Glasgow bakery and in Ayrshire collieries, was moved from an early age to assert the rights of the ordinary labourer. He helped to found and acted as agent of miners' unions in Scotland; he founded the paper

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1. Lansbury, George: Looking Backwards - and Forwards, London, 1935, pp. 87-8.

2. Lansbury at a Liberal and Radical meeting held at the National Liberal Club in 1889 moved a resolution for eight hours for all Government and municipal employees; the motion being passed he went to the Manchester meeting at the National Liberal Federation to move the same motion. Various people [including, surprisingly, Sidney Webb, who said the time was not right] tried to persuade Lansbury to withdraw the resolution "but I was," he later wrote, "pigheaded and obstinate. I said it was a conference, and a rank-and-filer like myself was entitled to be heard. But the Caucus said otherwise; when I mounted the platform Sir James [Kitson, who was presiding] rang a bell. I took no notice. One half of the audience supported me, the other half tried to howl me down. After a few minutes I was gently but firmly pushed down the steps and thus ended my connection with Liberalism." [Lansbury, George: My Life, London, 1928, p. 73]

The Miner in 1887, which became the Labour Leader in 1889; he also worked closely with H. H. Champion's London Labour Elector, founded in 1888. In the latter year, Hardie, who had played a prominent role in Lanarkshire Liberal politics, tried to obtain the Liberal nomination in a Parliamentary by-election. To his dismay the local Liberal caucus rode over him and nominated a young Welsh barrister, J. W. Phillips, heir of an ancient Welsh family of men of affairs and land-owners. Slighted, Hardie determined to run as an independent labour candidate, and despite the blandishments of Sir G. O. Trevelyan [a Liberal ex-Cabinet Minister] and Francis Schnadhorst, who went to Lanark to see him, despite the offer of a safe seat at the next General Election and an income of £300 yearly, despite the warnings of Threlfall, who used the L.E.A. against him, he fought the contest. Although he finished last, with only 617 votes, the Mid-Lanark by-election was a momentous occasion for Hardie and for the cause of Socialism. During his campaign Hardie had professed himself to be in favour of all that the Liberals espoused, plus more, nor did he advocate downright socialism. As Henry Pelling says: ". . . Keir Hardie's revolt at Mid-Lanark in 1888 had been directed, not against the policy of Gladstone, but against the system by which the local association chose its candidate."[1] Yet it was this campaign which convinced

1. Pelling, Henry: The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900, London, 1954, p. 236.

Hardie of the need for independent labour action, and in a far-seeing prophecy made during the by-election he said that the day would come "when Liberalism would be dead and buried in Great Britain and only the Labour Party would live."[1]

The immediate result of the Mid-Lanark race was the formation of the Scottish Labour Party. In this venture Hardie was encouraged by H. H. Champion, who had converted the London branch of the L.E.A. into the "National Labour Party" and had given much financial and physical aid to the Mid-Lanark campaign. The S.L.P. was not a frankly socialist party; it was, however, far more radical than any Liberal. Hardie was aided in its formation by James Shaw Maxwell, Dr. Clark and Cunninghame Graham; the inaugural conference in 1888 worked out a programme advocating all the usual Radical political reforms plus an eight hours act, and nationalisation of land, minerals, railways, and waterways. Of the S.L.P. proposals Beer says: "No Liberal would have given countenance to them; indeed, they were opposed by Liberal speakers and the Liberal press, and ridiculed either as leading to State slavery or to Utopia."[2]

While independent Labour political action was thus slowly gaining strength, largely due to want of Liberal co-operation,

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1. Hughes, Emrys: Keir Hardie, London, 1950, p. 30.
2. Beer, Max, op. cit., p. 300.

and while on the other hand the Lib-Labs continued to flourish, industrial action was fast on the increase. It was in London that the movement for a new kind of Unionism centred and from London that it rippled out with ever-growing consequences. The first manifestation of the New Unionism, as we have seen, was the strike of seven hundred match-girls in 1888, roused by an article of Annie Besant's in The Link and led by her and Herbert Burrows. Early in the next year Will Thorne's Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union achieved an almost miraculous victory in winning the eight-hour day without a strike. In six months Thorne's union gained 26,000 members, almost entirely from the ranks of men who had hitherto always been too downtrodden and underpaid to have a union of their own.

The full force of the New Unionism was felt in 1889 with the celebrated strike of the London dockers. In 1887 Ben Tillett, a waif from Bristol shrunken in size but huge in organising and speaking ability had formed the Tea Coopers' and General Labourers' Union. Its membership stayed around the 500 mark, despite [or perhaps thanks to] the help of the S.D.F. leaders, and it was almost annihilated after an abortive strike. In 1889, however, things were different. Helped by a convinced reaction against the Old Unionism and general prosperity, the dockers asked for significant gains; an increase of pay from 5d. to 6d. an hour - the famous "dockers' tanner"-overtime pay at 8d., the abolition of middlemen and

some regulation of the hated system of casual labour whereby men waited for hours in actual cages, hoping for a few hours of work at the expense of their mates. The actual cause of the strike, which began at the West India Docks, was trifling: "It was . . . a minor dispute over the division of some insignificant . . . bonus. But its cause lay deep within the past . . . "[1]

From surface appearances a strike of dock labourers appeared to have almost no chance of success. As Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash, then two young men from Toynbee Hall who were deeply concerned with the strike, wrote at the time about the dockers: "Including in their ranks members of all classes, and the drift of all trades, they have long seemed to offer the most unpromising field for any attempt at organised action. In John Burns' phrase they have been 'the despair of social reform, and the ghosts of the milk-and-water politician'. Every step in civilisation, every improvement in the organisation of the higher trades, has only seemed to make more hopeless the position of the fringe of labourers which does not share in the benefit of the change."[2] But all of the discontents of the past now welled up in a mighty effort. Tillett called in John Burns and Tom Mann

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1. Elton, Godfrey /Lord/: England, Arise! London, 1931, p. 151.

2. Smith, H. Llewellyn and Nash, Vaughan: The Story of the Dockers' Strike, London, 1890, pp. 26-7. Both men later became high-ranking civil servants.

to aid him and together the three men led the strike. Burns was the acknowledged leader; no longer the man with the Red Flag, he now donned a white straw hat and was easily recognised by the dockers, who grew almost to worship him.

It is impossible here to go at length into the details of the great strike. It spread to include almost all of the dockers, and a series of sympathy strikes raised the total number of strikers to 100,000. It was fought hard for a month and at its end, after all the turmoil and struggle, after the miracle of £30,000 sent from Australia [only £4,000 was contributed by all the "old" British unions], the dockers' demands were granted almost in full. "The full round orb of the dockers' tanner", as Burns called it, was a reality. The fact that a forty-hour week of "tanners" would still leave a docker's family far below Charles Booth's "subsistence level" did not prevent the strike from being a great and totally unprecedented success. It is also worth noting that, while aid was extended to the dockers from many middle-class sources, the actual work of the strike was undertaken almost entirely by the workers themselves. Among the middle classes only Champion and Cunninghame Graham played a prominent part as actual participants on the dockers' side.

The consequence of the great Dock Strike was enormous. Two months after its end the membership of the re-organised union, headed by Mann and Tillett, was 36,000 [a year later

it stood at 60,000/, and it offered a lead to all the other classes of downtrodden, unorganised workers. As Smith and Llewellyn observed at the time, the course of the strike "runs counter to the traditions of trade-unionism, but if the traditions had been respected the Dockers' Union could never have become an effective body."[1] The New Unionism spread out into many fields, greatly aided by the return of prosperity which aroused new hopes among the working classes. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain was formed in 1888-9, and fittingly its first conference, in 1889, was at Newport, South Wales, where just fifty years before a Chartist uprising had been ruthlessly suppressed. In five years' time the M.F.G.B. had over 200,000 members. New unions were established for shoe assistants, clerks, teachers, metal workers, seamen, railwaymen, agricultural labourers, textile workers; the movement gained with great rapidity everywhere. Even "old" unions like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, under the driving force of Mann and Burns, were revitalised and extended their memberships to new classes of workers.

The effects of the rise of the New Unionism were not solely industrial. Politically they tended towards a complete abandonment of Liberalism and a cry for a new society. Of the leaders of the strikes - Thorne, Tillett, Mann, Burns, and others - many were Socialists and Socialism supplied a

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

faith which was open to all to live. As Elton observes, the strikes needed "a more comprehensive creed, through which they might hope in due course to see Society remodelled to serve much less directly the interests of ownership and much more directly the interests of service. And what could this creed be but Socialism?"[1] The Webbs point out: "The victory of the London Dockers and the impetus it gave to Trade Unionism throughout the country at last opened the eyes of the trade union world to the significance of the new movement. It was no longer possible for the Parliamentary Committee to denounce the Socialists as a set of outside intriguers when Burns and Mann, now become the representative working-men Socialists, stood at the head of a body of 200,000 hitherto unorganised workmen."[2]

W. K. Lamb remarks that though socialism was embraced by the New Unionists not for its theory, but because its leaders were able and intelligent, the leaders remained "Socialists in spite of that, Their positions as officials of the 'new' unions . . . gave socialists a firm foothold within the Trade Union world."[3]

It was quite evident that the New Unionism could not and would not be hemmed in by the restrictive practices and the closed memberships of the Old. It was equally evident that

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1. Elton, op. cit., pp. 173-4.
2. Webb, Beatrice and Sidney, op. cit., p. 407.
3. Lamb, W. K.: British Labour and Parliament, 1865-1893, unpublished thesis, London, 1933, p. 579.

its aims were not merely industrial but political as well, and that politics to the New Unionists meant action far outside the scope of the Liberal Party. Bitterly they attacked Old Unionism for its narrowness, its limited vision, its selfishness; in 1887 Burns wrote that the old unions "had "ceased to be unions for maintaining the rights of labour and have degenerated into mere middle and upper-class rate-reducing institutions."[1] In contrast, he said three years later, the New Unions "believe that distinctions of labour must disappear and that class prejudices that have disintegrated the labour movement must be abolished."[2] And in the same year Mann and Tillett observed: "Poverty, in our opinion, can be abolished, and we consider it is the duty of the trade unionist to do this. The man or woman who honestly toils . . . is of the most vital concern to the community."[3] Thus while most of the people who embraced the New Unionism were not themselves Socialists, Socialism benefited from its growth and Liberalism suffered. Furthermore, the Socialist advocacy of the eight-hour day movement, the "model employer" drive and the cry of "unionism for all" made it seem far more respectable and indigenously working class than had the

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1. Maccoby, Simon: English Radicalism, 1886-1914, London, 1953, pp. 85-6.

2. Hobsbawm, op. cit., p. 73.

3. Ibid., p. 98.

dialectical, dogmatic Social Democratic Federation. The first British May Day, held in 1890, was a gigantic demonstration in favour of the eight-hour movement, and was modelled on the Continental Socialist agitations for eight hours.

It was also evident that the industrial movement could not fail to influence even the T.U.C. itself. Its composition and membership, moreover, were fast changing. Between 1886 and 1890 T.U.C. membership jumped from over half a million to almost a million and a half, and many of its new adherents represented New Unions. According to Lamb, the 1889 T.U.C. had 171 affiliated organisations representing 885,000 workers, while in 1890 the numbers were 311 and 1,470,000. With such increases and with such victories to call them on to further conquests, the New Unionists lost no time in pressing the need for action at T.U.C. conferences. In 1887, Hardie, attending his first Congress, gave strong support to the demand for a separate Labour Party and attacked Broadhurst, though without success; however, the conference again accepted the proposal for payment of M.P.'s which it had earlier abandoned. In 1888 a motion by John Hodge, of the Scottish Steel Smelters, for independent labour members lost by 82 to 18, while in 1889 the defeat was even more severe. Hardie made the error of attacking Henry Broadhurst personally, and this action lost him much support. Mrs. Webb told her diary:
"A battle raged at Congress between the supporters of Broadhurst and old-fashioned methods, on the one hand, and

the Socialists, led by Burns and Mrs. Besant on the other . . . The Socialists have apparently spent the last year in spreading calumny of all sorts, besides trying to persuade the rank and file that Broadhurst is a reactionary. But I think that they have carried it too far. Among English working-men of the better type there is a rooted dislike to desert old leaders: an intense suspicion of the mere talker who has not proved his faculty for steady work. Then the Socialist at present labours under the disadvantage of relying on outside money and brains. 'Why should I be dictated to by an ex-artillery officer?' [Champion] was one of Broadhurst's most effective points . . . . So the whole Congress set its back up; the Socialists dwindled down to 11 while Broadhurst's supporters numbered 177. A brilliant victory for the conservative section . . . "[1]

By 1890, however, the prevailing mood at the Congress had changed very markedly. Though an amendment by James Macdonald to the "hardy annual" resolution for Labour representation which called for support only of Socialist candidates was lost [by 55 to 263], the Congress constituted in other respects a great Socialist victory. The Eight Hours movement, so long opposed, was now at last endorsed by 193 votes to 155, while 60 resolutions were carried of which Burns said: "Out of these sixty resolutions, forty-five were

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1. Webb, Beatrice: Our Partnership, London, 1948, pp. 21-2.

nothing more or less than direct appeals to the State and Municipalities of this country to do for the workmen what Trade Unionism, 'Old' and 'New', has proved itself incapable of doing. Forty-five out of the sixty resolutions were asking for state or municipal interference on behalf of the weak against the strong. 'Old' trade unionists, from Lancashire, Northumberland, and Birmingham, asked for as many of these resolutions as the delegates from London; but it is a remarkable and significant fact that 19 out of 20 delegates were in favour of the 'New' trades union ideas of state interferences in all things except reduction of hours, and even on this we secured a majority that certainly entitles we specialists to be jubilant at our success."[1] Measures which the T.U.C. now endorsed included municipal organisation of work for the unemployed, registration of all factories under the Factory and Sanitary Acts, workmen magistrates, mines inspection, boycotts of any firms not paying trade union wages, and others. The T.U.C. had now in effect thrown its support to a kind of collectivism, and Henry Broadhurst recognised the new trend by resigning as Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee.

The five years following 1890 were years which in some

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1. Burns, John: Speech on the Liverpool Congress, September 21, 1890, London, p. 13.

ways strengthened the Lib-Lab element and checked the growth of the anti-Liberal working-class forces. For one thing, the New Unionism seemed suddenly to lose power. It had over-extended itself, gathering in new members like wildfire, and in an almost inevitable reaction it lost many of them. Unsuccessful strikes were a heavy blow; in South London in 1890 the gas stokers were defeated and lost their vaunted eight-hour day. Strikes were fought in number in the early 'nineties and most of them were lost. The "Labour Riots" in Bristol in 1892 came to nothing, as did the Hull dock strike of 1893. The Durham Miners and Tyneside Engineers lost strikes in 1892, while despite the achievement of the Brooklands Agreement [1893], long strikes in the Lancashire Cotton industry in 1892 and 1893 were only partially successful. A strike of Dundee jute workers in 1893 was also unsuccessful.

The strike of greatest significance, however, came in July, 1893, when the mineowners demanded a 25 per cent reduction in wages, after the price of coal had fallen by 35 per cent. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain refused the demand and a look-out, followed by a strike, ensued. Three hundred thousand miners were affected; by the end of October, three months after the lock-out had begun, 87,000 men had returned to work. A fortnight later, after intercession by the Government and mediation by Lord Rosebery, the miners

went back to work without a wage reduction, though a reduction of ten per cent took effect a few months later. /The following year strikes in the Scottish and Welsh pits were unsuccessful, the men being driven back at reduced wages./ Thus, while the M.F.G.B. strike had not been a defeat, it was not a victory, and its membership shrank in subsequent years from the 1891 figure of 200,000 to less than 150,000 in 1897. New Unionism had been checked, though not defeated. Further disaffection from the Liberal Party was caused, however, when in the M.F.G.B. strike two miners were killed by soldiers at Featherstone, in Yorkshire. The soldiers had been sent by order of the Home Secretary, H. H. Asquith, who had had a reputation for Radicalism and friendliness to the working classes, and the action was long held against him. The miners' official biographer states: "For long afterwards Asquith's name in the mind of many workers was associated primarily with the shooting-down of unarmed miners."[1]

The New Unions /whose numbers had, in any case, probably been somewhat exaggerated/ suffered as well from the economic depression which began again in full force in 1893 and caused the abatement of industrial action which usually follows an increase of unemployment. Moreover, New Unionism was beginning to take on some of the aspects of the Old.

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1. Arnot, R. Page: The Miners, 1889-1910, London, 1949, p. 238.

Friendly benefits multiplied and exclusionist practices grew. Finally, the employers now began to take united action against labour militancy; as Hobhouse says: "A period of reaction set in . . . as the 'New Unionism' . . . died away in the early 'Nineties."[1] Halévy says that twelve employers' associations were founded between 1890 and 1892, making 70 in all by the later date, and a National Free Labour Association was formed in an attempt to start non-union, employer-influenced associations among the workers. This anti-labour employer action was to grow more pronounced in subsequent years.

Something, however, did remain of the New Unionism; it left a permanent imprint on the Labour movement. While T. U. C. membership figures shrank after 1890, by 1895 it had still a million affiliated members, twice the number of a decade before. Furthermore, another half million workers were organised outside the ranks of the T. U. C. and Halévy says that 20 per cent of the adult male wage-earners were unionised in 1895. The political tendencies of New Unionism, its desire to be free of the Liberal Party, remained, and Socialism became an accepted term among working-class circles. The Webbs agree: "Some of the . . . characteristics of the New Unionism of 1889 promptly faded away . . . . But just as 1873-4 left behind it a far more permanent structure than

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1. Hobhouse, L. T.: The Labour Movement, London, 1912, p. 11.

1833-4, so 1889-90 added even more . . . this indicates a widening of the mental horizon, a genuine elevation of the Trade Union Movement."[1]

In the T.U.C. there continued for some time to be progress made. James Macdonald's Socialist resolution was again voted down in 1891, but the T.U.C. agreed to back candidates "independent of party politics". In 1892 the Socialist measure again lost, but only by 153 to 128, and the Parliamentary Committee was instructed to prepare a scheme for independent labour representation. In 1893 at Belfast the Congress finally passed the Socialist motion, 137 to 97; henceforth the T.U.C. was to support only candidates who believed in "collective ownership and control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange."[2] A special committee was set up to administer the measure. But the victory was far from complete; obstinately the Congress refused to support an independent Labour Party in the House of Commons and in the following year the Parliamentary Committee reported that no progress had been made. Nor had a resolution asking for trade union financial support of independent labour candidates been furthered. In 1895 a blow fell on the Socialists when a motion prepared by the

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1. Webb, Beatrice and Sidney, op. cit., pp. 420-1.

2. Elton, op. cit., p. 282.

combined efforts of John Burns, newly converted to the right-wing, James Mawdsley, the Conservative Secretary of the Lancashire Cotton Spinners, and Henry Broadhurst was passed. This motion prevented any but full-time workers or trade union officials from attending Congresses as delegates, and while this cost Broadhurst his place it hurt the Socialists, notable among whom was of course Keir Hardie, far more seriously. Moreover, the "block vote", by delegates, was established; the "collective ownership" motion was thus lost this year by 607,000 to 186,000.

The renewed conservatism of the T.U.C. was part of a growing industrial moderation, a disinclination on the part of the union leaders to take radical political steps, specially during a period of economic adversity. The leftish tendencies of individual unions like the Amalgamated Society of . Engineers did not reverse this general trend in 1890-1895.

To counteract the conservative tenor of industrial and trade-union action, however, there was a sudden surge towards independent labour political action within the ranks of the working-class itself. The Lib-Labs did not die away in these years, however; on the contrary, they continued to flourish. Eight of the nine sitting Lib-Labs were returned in 1892 and two new ones were elected, none being opposed by the Liberal Party. Moreover, the ten Lib-Labs who were defeated, including Henry Broadhurst, were not opposed by Liberals, and some profited by Liberal financing. Between

1890 and 1892 came the height of the Labour Electoral Association's activities and the peak of what active political power it possessed.

Steadily, however, the power of the L. E. A. was being broken. Little by little the Socialists were beginning to capture local Trades Councils and sometimes formed rival Labour representation bodies. Joseph Burgess took the lead in forming local organisations through his newspaper; on April 30, 1892, he asked for news of independent labour supporters, and acting as an organising agency collected over two thousand names in just over four months. In June, 1892, Independent Labour groups were established in Plymouth, Stafford, Mansfield, Bolton, Hull, Liverpool, and Birmingham. Gradually the militants left the L. E. A., and the remainder of the body fell almost entirely under Liberal influence. Thus in 1892 it opposed Ben Tillett at West Bradford as it had opposed Keir Hardie at Mid-Lanark, again because of local Liberal opposition to a labour candidate. But in spite of its willingness to follow the Liberal lead, the L. E. A. was little welcomed by that party. Its support for payment of members and returning officers' fees was largely ignored by the Liberals, and these measures were left unfulfilled during the 1892-1895 Liberal Government's tenure of office. The result was obvious: "The Liberal Party took almost no notice of it, and . . . after the ignominy of two General Elections

in which it secured no concessions, it faded away in 1895-6."[1] Thus the Liberal reluctance to work with the trade unions, often through sheer snobbery, cost them their most valuable allies.

Meanwhile, the cause of labour independence was growing fast. All over the country indigenous socialist movements were beginning and small working-class newspapers were becoming established. Bolton, Bradford, Glasgow, Rochdale, Darlington boasted their Socialist papers; perhaps the best known among them was Burgess' *Workman's Times* which was published weekly in Bradford from 1890 to 1894. The papers were supported by organisations in various towns which acted as pinpoints of Socialist propaganda. In the 1892 election there were no fewer than seventeen independent Labour candidates of one shade of opinion or another, whereas in 1886 there had been virtually none. Of the seventeen, three were elected. These were Keir Hardie for West Ham, John Burns for Battersea, and Havelock Wilson, the leader of the Seamen's Union, for Middlesbrough. Although only Wilson was opposed by a Liberal and although he and Burns were both to become Lib-Labs in a very short period of time, the three were nevertheless the first avowedly independent labour men elected to the House of Commons. Hardie was the foremost spokesman of the independents; it was at about this time

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1. Pelling, Henry, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

that he felt the time to be ripe for independent labour action. "Asked whether he would join the Liberal and Radical Party, he replied that he expected to form an independent labour party."[1]

It was in fact the Independent Labour Party which resulted from this election and preceding and subsequent agitation. At Bradford early in 1893 a conference was called of which Hardie was made chairman. It was distinctly a group of northerners; of the 124 delegates, no fewer than 100 came from north of the Midlands. This fact is due to two causes. First, because so much of the independent labour propaganda had been focussed in the industrial North and in Scotland. The northern factory workers and Scottish miners were by far the leading labour militants, and it was in the North that most of the early independent labour groups existed. Moreover, London's strong Social Radicalism, bolstered by the strength of the Radical workingmen's clubs, had thus far blocked an effective Socialist organisation from appearing there. Industrial militancy in the capital had not been matched by political independence. Thus Pelling remarks: "The success of London Progressivism prevented the emergence in the metropolis of an independent labour movement as a political parallel to the New Unionism . . . . With Sidney Webb as the organiser of the programme of municipal socialism and with John Burns as its principal

1. Elton, _op. cit._, p. 201.

labour exponent, the alliance with the Liberals worked smoothly in its early years and the work of the reform went on with little opposition."[1]

The I.L.P. did not adopt the word "Socialist" in its title because it feared to antagonise the trade unions which it was hoping to win over. This caution, however, did not prevent it from advocating a thoroughly Socialist programme and anouncing that its object was "to secure the collective ownership of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange." This concentration on Socialism did not blind the I.L.P. to the need to win trade union support. Themselves almost entirely working-class in nature [the Fabians attended the Bradford conference but turned up their noses and generally made themselves unpleasant to the I.L.P. for many years, though the Fabian local societies were far more ready to co-operate than was the national Society], the delegates were mostly not trade-union officials. They realised full well the blocks to militancy in trade unions, and the advantages which some workers like, for example, the Northumberland and county Durham miners possessed, which made them loath to join with other, less-privileged unions. The I.L.P.-ers realised that their primary aim must be to educate and to agitate, and they were in fact well prepared to do just

1. Pelling, op. cit., p. 96.

that. For while their Socialism was as sincere and as thorough-going as that of the S.D.F., their method of approach was far more indigenous to British conditions, and the working-class, non-dogmatic character of their early leaders - Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Fred Jowett, Robert Smillie, J. R. Clynes and others - made Socialism at once understandable and appealing to their fellow-workers. As Beer says of the I.L.P.: "Its main task appeared to consist in detaching the working classes from Liberalism and showing them that political Labour could not constitute a branch of Liberalism any more than trade unions could join the employers' associations."[1]

Little by little the I.L.P. gained support. In part it continued to gain from the Liberals' genteel horror of working-class candidates. In 1895, for example, Keir Hardie received the following letter: "My dear Hardie: [it read] I am now making personal application for membership in the I.L.P. I have stuck to the Liberals up to now, hoping that they might do something to justify the trust that we had put in them. Attercliffe [a by-election in 1895 where a Liberal opposed the I.L.P. candidate] came as a rude awakening, and I felt during that contest that it was quite impossible for me to maintain my position as a Liberal any longer."[2]

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1. Beer, op. cit., p. 303.

2. Good, Dorothy: Economic and Political Origins of the Labour Party from 1884 to 1914, unpublished thesis, London, 1936, pp. 87-8.

The letter was signed J. Ramsay MacDonald; MacDonald was an I.L.P. candidate in the General Election of 1895. Writing to Herbert Samuel in August of that year, MacDonald spoke bitterly of the Liberals: "They kicked us out and slammed the door in our faces. A little generosity on their part at the Election [of that year which had resulted in a sweeping Conservative victory] would have gone a long way in building a bridge of understanding between the parties [i.e., Liberal and Independent Labour]. The Liberals chose to stick to their purses and official votes. There can be no going back now."[1]

The religious enthusiasm which motivated Keir Hardie touched a responsive chord. Elton quotes Keir Hardie: "Socialism, I say again, is not a system of economics. It is life for the dying people," then adds: "Could any member of the [Social Democratic] Federation or the [Socialist] League have spoken thus?"[2] The Nonconformist tradition of so many working-men was easily moved in response to the words of Keir Hardie. His Socialism was not Marxist in the dogmatic sense, nor was it cold and analytical. It came from the heart, from the deeply religious character of Hardie, as if from a prophet of the Old Testament voicing the ethics of the New. It was this simplicity and sincerity of a deepfelt

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1. Samuel, [Sir] Herbert [Lord]: Memoirs, London, 1945, p. 27.

2. Elton, op. cit., p. 174.

religion which enabled Hardie to awake so responsive a chord in the minds and hearts of many of his listeners.

In this religious appeal Hardie and the I.L.P. were aided by the Labour Church movement begun and fostered by John Trevor, which flourished in the North of England between 1891 and 1900. The Labour Churches had little dogma beside a broad belief in the ethical teachings of Christianity; they were breeding-grounds for Socialists and many of the early I.L.P. leaders spoke in them as well as in the usual Nonconformist chapels. Thus while far from all of the I.L.P.-ers were in fact religious their tendency in this direction gave them for a time a source of strength. Fenner Brockway says: "The Labour Church Movement became a great power in the North of England, presenting Socialism as an ethical gospel and supplanting the spoken words with Labour hymns sung to old chapel tunes."[1]

The early propaganda of the I.L.P. was, then, in favour of independent labour action, not solely theoretical socialism. As Halévy points out: "They were aware that if they were to gain a footing among the trade unionists whose Socialism was unconscious, they must begin by excluding from their programme any features which could in any way suggest religious or political revolution. . ."[2] Clement Attlee's

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1. Brookway, Fenner: Socialism over Sixty Years, London, 1946, p. 41.

2. Halévy, Élie: A History of the English People: Epilogue Vol. 1: 1895-1905, London, 1929, p. 225.

verdict is: "It was the emergence of the Independent Labour Party which was the effective force in turning the Trade-Union movement from Liberalism, and Keir Hardie . . . had the prescience to see that a body of working men returned to Parliament, pledged to act with complete independence of either of the Capitalist parties, was bound in due course to adopt the Socialist faith. He, therefore, concentrated on the point of immediate practical importance, that of separating organised Labour from dependence on Liberalism . . ."[1] And Hugh Gaitskell points out: "Keir Hardie . . . was absolutely clear that if the I.L.P. was to have any hope of support in the unions and in the country generally, it must concentrate on bread and butter issues which mattered to people then and there."[2]

Hardie thus concentrated on the two themes of a religious, emotional approach with an appeal to practical, independent action. In a typical speech, delivered in 1893, he said, "The mighty unseen forces which make for progress have decreed the commencement of a new era, and the Liberal Party is endeavouring to live and flourish on what were the big reforms of twenty-five years ago. Liberalism, even in its most advanced form, is a quarter of a century in the rear of the requirements of the times . . . . The I.L.P. . . .

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1. Attlee, C. R.: The Labour Party in Perspective, London, 1937, p. 38.

2. Gaitskell, Hugh: Recent Developments in British Socialist Thinking, [pamphlet], London, 1956, pp. 4-5

sees and chafes at the impotency of Liberalism . . . Liberalism has no word of hope or cheer . . ."[1]

Hardie's record in the House of Commons bore out his words. From the moment when the new Parliament met in 1892, he was a man apart. His cloth cap and triumphant entry, escorted by either a small brass band or one cornet player [according to various stories], announced his presence, and he was not long in assuming the role of "member for the unemployed", who were soon to number four millions. Hardie's lone attacks made him a marked man, but at no time as much as when, on June 23, 1894, 260 miners were killed in an explosion at the Albion Colliery, at Cilfynydd, South Wales. Parliament took no notice of this disaster, but duly recorded its sympathy with the French people over the assassination of their President, Carnot, and its congratulations to Queen Victoria on the birth of a grandchild, now the Duke of Windsor [all three events had occurred in little over 24 hours]. Hardie was roused to fury by the fact that no recognition had been taken of a great national catastrophe, and he asked Sir William Harcourt, leader of the House, if a resolution of sympathy with the miners' relatives were to be passed. Harcourt, replying in the negative, added in an offhand manner: "I can dispose of that now by

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1. Hughes, Emrys, op. cit., p. 64.

saying that the House does sympathise with these poor people."[1] Hardie was now even more incensed, and moved an amendment to the address of congratulation which would record the House's detestation of the economic system which had caused so many horrible and needless deaths and ask the Queen to express her sympathy with the miners' relatives. This being ruled out of order, Hardie then spoke against the address, and the reaction of the House came quickly. It howled, it raged, shouted Hardie down and condemned him as an agitator, a demagogue, and a destroyer of morality. Liberal M.P.'s vied with Conservatives to denounce the out-cast. "Society" and the Press equally condemned him and attributed his action to "a hatred of Christ and Christianity".[2] The significance of the fact that such a display had occurred, however, and moreover had occurred in a Liberal House of Commons, was not lost on the working-class public.

The General Election of 1895 seemed at first a disaster for the I.L.P. Its twenty-eight candidates alike suffered defeat; even Hardie was beaten by 775 votes in West Ham. Behind the apparent defeat, however, behind the mere 44,321 I.L.P. votes, an augury of success loomed. As Pelling says: "The I.L.P. showed that, poor as it was, it could fight

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1. Cole, G. D. H.: <u>British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914</u>, London, 1941, p. 118.

2. Elton, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 244.

elections against both Liberals and Conservatives and yet secure polls that were no discredit to the cause. It was a party with a future; and, given the support of the trade unions, it was obvious that the future would be rich in Parliamentary success."[1] The swing to the left had been small, but in a year of Conservative landslide, when not only the I.L.P. but other socialist candidates, Lib-Labs and the Liberal Party had all suffered heavily, the I.L.P. showing was evidence of a growing force.

There was one more sign in the 1891-5 period that independent labour was a growing phenomenon. That sign was called The Clarion. This amazing paper was the creation of Robert Blatchford, the son of poverty-stricken strolling players, who had been a soldier and than a highly successful journalist for the Manchester Sunday Chronicle. In 1891, at the age of forty, Blatchford realised that he was a Socialist, partly from reading William Morris, and with a few friends established his paper. Within a very short space of time it caught on as no other had ever done. Mrs. Cole says: "There never was a paper like it; it was not in the least the preconceived idea of a Socialist journal. It was not solemn; it was not high-brow; it did not deal in theoretical discussions or inculcate dreary isms. It was full of stories, jokes, and verses . . ."[2] The Clarion was

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1. Pelling, Henry, op. cit., ~~pp. 229-5.~~ p. 233
2. Cole, Margaret, op. cit., p. 195.

a highly successful attempt to show ordinary men and women that Socialism was in fact the creed of the people, that it was the only creed of true democracy, that it could make meaningful the unhappy lives of the millions who weltered in poverty, vice, and misery. Having been at the bottom himself, Blatchford knew what it meant to be poor, and his gay, comradely articles met a wide, heartfelt response. He felt that all men could and must be made brothers and was at one with Keir Hardie in this respect, though in little else. Lord Elton says: "He had never read a line of Marx but he had understood William Morris and he knew his fellow-countrymen."[1] Clarion Clubs were formed for every purpose; there was a Clarion Fellowship, Clarion Vans touring the countryside to sell papers, stick posters on unsuspecting cows and preach socialism, Clarion Cycling Clubs, Clarion Glee Clubs, Clarion Cinderella Clubs. The Clarion aided the poor without making the aid seem like charity; it performed multiple social tasks, it helped also to enliven bleak Sundays with its many activities.

By 1894, the paper was selling 100,000 penny copies each week, and in that year Blatchford published Merrie England, an appeal for Socialism set out in simple terms and addressed to "John Smith". Its success was instant and phenomenal; 750,000 copies were sold at once and in little over a year

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1. Elton, op. cit., p. 194.

sales stood at over one million, in addition to at least another million in pirated American editions. It was translated into Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, French, Spanish, and Hebrew. Blatchford's appeal for Socialism was balanced by a violent attack on the old parties: "The issue is not an issue between Liberals and Tories, it is an issue between Labourers and Capitalists. Neither of the Political Parties is of any use to the workers, because both the Political Parties are paid, officered and led by Capitalists . . . . If you want to get an idea of how utterly destitute of sympathy with Labour the present [Liberal, be it reminded] House of Commons is, just read the reports of the speeches made on the occasions when Keir Hardie opposed the vote of congratulations on the Royal Marriage or when he and other Labour members raised the question of the employment of troops at Hull; or notice the attitude of the Party Press towards Socialism, Trade Unionism, Independent Labour Candidates, and the leaders of strikes . . . During an election there are Tory and Liberal capitalists, and all of them are friends of the workers. During a strike there are no Tories and no Liberals among the employers. They are all Capitalists and enemies of the workers. Is there any logic in you, John Smith? Is there any perception in you? Is there any *sense* in you?"[1]

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1. Blatchford, Robert: *Merrie England*, London, 1894, pp. 198-200.

Blatchford's pen wielded a great influence to the end of the century and beyond, and his Socialism of simplicity, equality, and comradeship was a powerful force in attracting converts. Philip Snowden later testified: "No man did more than he to make Socialism understood by the ordinary working man . . . Socialism as he taught it was not a cold, materialistic theory, but the promise of a new life as full, sweet, and noble as the world can give."[1]

In the years between 1896 and 1900 the various strands making for separation between Labour and Liberalism were drawn increasingly closer together. The prosperity which began again about 1896 was not as notable for labour militancy as it was for an aggressive attitude on the part of the business classes, far more than in the 1890-95 period. "As business improved and the threat to British Capitalism did not appear so immediate as in the 'eighties, confidence returned . . . . With it, opinion towards Labour hardened . . and something of a counter-attack developed."[2] The employers determined to resist union agitations far more than in the past and launched a strong effort to form "free labour" unions. This effort was fearsome to even the most conservative of unionists. Constantly they were reminded that Liberal M.P.'s were of the business classes and the lesson

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1. Snowden, Philip [Viscount]: An Autobiography, vol. 1, London, 1934, p. 58.
2. Hobsbawm, Eric, op. cit., p. xix.

was rubbed home that these employers often sat for the strongest working-class constituencies. Three examples will suffice here. Alfred Illingsworth, owner of a spinning firm, was Liberal member for Bradford West, 1880-95;[1] in 1906 the seat was won for Labour by Fred Jowett, who had lost it by only 41 votes in 1900. Sir Joseph Pease, Liberal M.P. for Barnard Castle, 1885-1903, was Chairman of the North-Eastern Railway Company; his successor was Arthur Henderson. Sir James Kitson, an iron and steel manufacturer and a leader of the National Liberal Federation, was the Liberal member for Colne Valley between 1892 and 1907. He was succeeded by the Socialist Victor Grayson.

The seriousness of the employer counterattack was finally realised by the workers. Lord Snell, at the time a campaigner for the I.L.P., writes: "In the end . . . the unions found themselves confronted by a capitalism which was better organised than themselves and, notwithstanding their accumulated wealth and negotiating strength, they found themselves powerless to do anything, as unions, either to produce a more equitable social order, or even effectually to protect their own members in the limited spheres of wages and hours. *They were therefore compelled to choose between impotence in the industrial sphere and the possibility of success through organised political power.*

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1. In fact, Illingsworth retired in 1895 due to his opposition to coming trends; see Chapter Six.

"Thus, when we [of the I.L.P.] began our propaganda among the members of the unions, they were already disillusioned with and impatient of, the old methods, and they were won to the new faith with unexpected ease and speed. They were detached from Liberalism and Toryism as easily as grapes are taken from a vine."[1]

This hardening of the employers' attitudes into what may be called an anti-union offensive was highlighted by the unsuccessful strikes which characterised the 1896-1900 period. There were not many strikes in these years; those which did take place, however, were of great significance. The first and most important labour dispute concerned the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, one of the best-organised, most powerful and wealthiest of the "old" unions. The A.S.E. had fallen prey to the New Unionism, however, and under the impetus of Tom Mann and John Burns, aided by its new Secretary, George Barnes, who was elected in 1896, it had adopted a more aggressive and militant policy. An 1895 strike for higher wages in Scotland and Northern Ireland had failed, and in 1897 the battle was joined on the issue of the eight-hour day. A lock-out of almost 30,000 men was called by the newly-formed Employers' Federation of Engineering Associations, and the union replied by striking, 45,000 men being affected in all. For thirty weeks the battle raged; the engineers

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1. Snell, Harry, op. cit., p. 143.

fought valiantly and were aided by subscriptions from outside of no less than £116,000.[1] Seventy thousand pounds of this sum was subscribed by the British trade unions, compared to a niggardly £4,000 during the Dock Strike eight years before. All the aid, however, was without avail. The engineers were forced to give in; the strike was lost and the union had suffered heavily.

It was more than the A.S.E. which suffered from the strike of 1897. It was, says Halévy, "the most serious defeat which British trade-unionism had received within living memory."[2] The working-class realised with a start how much ground there was still to gain and how weak they really were. Crowley says that the engineers' strike "marks more than any other single event the conversion of the trade union movement to the independent labour policy."[3] The declared intention of the employers to rid the engineering industry of trade unionism altogether had now to be faced and fought. If the A.S.E., one of the strongest and best organised unions in existence, as well as one of the oldest, could be so decisively defeated, it was obvious to many unionists that industrial action alone would no longer

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1. The facts for this section are taken from Halévy, Élie, op. cit., pp. 250-9.

2. Halévy, op. cit., p. 252.

3. Crowley, D. W.: The Origins of the Revolt of the British Labour Movement from Liberalism, unpublished thesis, London, 1952, pp. 662-3.

suffice. Public opinion was no longer as sympathetic as when its imagination had been aroused by the embattled dockers in 1889, and the employers were far stronger. Political action, it was becoming evident, was now the only recourse.

Serious as it was, the A.S.E. defeat was not the only significant loss suffered by the unions in these years. In 1898 a strike of the South Wales miners broke out, and 90,000 men were involved. The strike dragged on for almost five months before the miners were starved into submission. Their losses were considerable; even their monthly holiday known as 'Mabon's Day' was lost. "Mabon" himself, the M.P. William Abraham, confessed defeat. After failing to secure even an annual 'Mabon's Day', their leader told the miners: "It has been a fearful fight all day. It was a case of Mabon fighting tooth and nail for his say. It has gone by. You will, boys, do the same as I have had to do today, namely accept the inevitable and prepare for better things."[1]

A third strike, equally unsuccessful, was called by the North Wales Quarry workers. Although relatively small it dragged on for years and became a national issue. At the same time, in 1898, the employers capitalised on their successes and formed a united central federation. A council was established to "organise for freedom" and its formation

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1. Halévy, op. cit., p. 255.

was a further warning omen to the unions.

The actions of the employers, the lost strikes, were rendered even more threatening by the attitude of the courts. The workers had come to look upon the Acts of 1871, 1875, and 1876, as the cornerstone of British trade union rights, and in the 'nineties the stone was fast being chipped away. Several cases limited the rights of unions to picket, to boycott, and generally to remain capable of exercising effective action to protect their members' rights. The Webbs wrote retrospectively: "After-ages will be amazed at the flagrant unfairness with which the conception of a 'conspiracy to injure' was applied at the close of the nineteenth century. . . . It became . . . at least theoretically possible that almost any action by a Trade Union by which an employer felt himself injured might be summarily prohibited by peremptory injunction."[1] Already in 1897 they had warned: "Collective bargaining will become impossible if, whenever trade unionists are warned not to accept employment from a particular firm for any reason whatsoever, the trade union officials can be harrassed by writs, cast in damages, and driven into bankruptcy."[2] The trend of decisions continued and gathered momentum during the last years of the

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1. Webb, Beatrice and Sidney, op. cit., pp. 598-9.

2. From Industrial Democracy, quoted in Halévy, op. cit., p. 270.

century, and talk was even heard of new, confining, trade union legislation. The trend reached its climax in the Taff Vale case of 1900-01, seriously endangering long-established trade-union rights, but as Beer makes clear: "By decisions of the law courts the right of picketing was gradually curtailed and the freedom from collective responsibility nullified. The process of shattering trade union law began in 1896 . . . . The Taff Vale decision was but the sensational revelation of an accomplished fact."[1]

Thus the unions were harrassed by the employers and the courts, and found no comfort from the Liberal Party, which was deeply divided over social reform, over the issues of Imperialism which were to lead to the Boer War, by personalities, and which was in any case out of office. Gladstone's death in 1898 was the snapping of a link of sentiment which had tied Labour to Liberalism,[2] and slowly the unions were forced to the conclusion that they must act on their own initiative if they were to preserve their effective existence. As Hobhouse points out: "That which no Socialist writer or platform could achieve was effected by the judges."[3] John

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1. Beer, op. cit., pp. 315-6. See Appendix II.

2. Even Hardie wrote at this time: "to him, [i.e., Gladstone] freedom was the one condition of value in human life . . . . Wherever men proved their desire for freedom, by struggling to obtain it, his support was never long withheld." [Humphrey, A. W.: A History of Labour Representation, London, 1912, p. 140.]

3. Hobhouse, L. T., op. cit., p. 12.

Parker states succinctly: "Feeling that the Liberal Party was both unsympathetic and offered little prospect of being able to give them much practical help, the Trades Union Congress was at last persuaded to give its backing to the idea of a separate Labour Party."[1] Industrially, the unions took action; trade union membership rose between 1895 and 1900 from just under a million and a half to almost two million, while the number of unionists affiliated to the T.U.C. rose to 1,500,000. The South Wales Miners united to form a Miners' Federation for the first time, and general increases in membership were recorded widely. The M.F.G.B., for example, with 148,562 members in 1897, through increases and amalgamations rose to 363,335 in 1900.

Politically, there was equally an offensive. The 1896 T.U.C. again passed the motion of James Macdonald's advocating socialism, though with some modifications, and the following year the Congress once more adopted the full 1893 position of support for socialism and financial backing of candidates. In 1899 the die was at last cast. The Congress met at Plymouth heard a resolution moved by J. H. Holmes of the Railway Servants' union, reading "that this Congress, having regard to its decisions in former years, and with a view to securing a better representation of the interests of Labour in the House of Commons, hereby instructs the

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1. Parker, John, op. cit., p. 18.

Parliamentary Committee to invite the co-operation of all the co-operative, socialistic, trade-union and other working-class organisations to jointly co-operate on lines mutually agreed upon, in convening a special congress of representatives from such of the above-named organisations as may be willing to take part to devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of Labour members in the next Parliament."[1] Seconded by James Sexton of the Liverpool dockers and supported by Margaret Bondfield and other Socialist speakers, the motion was passed by 546,000 to 434,000. It seemed not to be a momentous decision; the resolution said nothing about Socialism or about an independent labour group with its own whips. But the decision was a great one nevertheless; it made possible a Labour Party which could be gradually converted to Socialism. It had been hammered out by Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald in the offices of the _Labour Leader_ and had the full backing of all the Socialist forces in the T.U.C.

The Socialists, in fact, managed their campaign adeptly. At a committee meeting held shortly after the Congress, the I.L.P., the S.D.F., and the Fabian Society all sent representatives, while one of the T.U.C. delegates, Will Thorne, was a convinced Socialist, and others were quite advanced in their views. The committee arranged a conference to be held

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1. Williams, Francis, _op. cit._, p. 15.

in February, 1900, in London; some of the delegates attended, MacDonald wrote, "to bury the attempt in good-humoured tolerance, a few to make sure that burial would be its fate, but the majority determined to give it a chance."[1] There were 129 delegates at this February conference, representing about half a million organised workers, mostly of very small unions. Perhaps this was the reason why the unionists had agreed that the I.L.P. and the S.D.F. should each have two members on the Executive Committee, and the Fabians one, though together the three bodies had a total membership of only a very few thousand. The unions, on the other hand, had merely seven members on the Committee.

The Conference took a definite stand. By 102 to 3 a resolution was adopted which would allow any one to stand as a candidate of the new Labour Representation Committee, provided the candidate was supported by one of the groups at the Conference or by the Co-operative movement. Thus from the start the L.R.C. declared itself a movement not solely of working men, and showed a foresight which the Liberal Party so sorely lacked. A motion of James Macdonald's for an outright socialist policy was met by a more mild one supporting only a few accepted measures, and this resolution was passed, the I.L.P. supporting it so as not to antagonise the unions. Then came the measure of greatest importance.

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1. Humphrey, A. W.: A History of Labour Representation, London, 1912, p. 144.

Hardie moved a resolution which favoured the establishment of a "distinct Labour group in Parliament who shall have their own Whips."[1] This resolution was carried unanimously, and the amendment to Macdonald's was withdrawn. Thus the L.R.C., while not becoming a Socialist Party, and while agreeing in the same motion to co-operate with other parties as occasion might demand, had taken the first step towards socialism by establishing firmly both its catholicity and its independence. Once independence had been achieved Socialism inevitably followed, for as this chapter has tried to point out and as W. K. Lamb aptly says: "Until the coming of Socialism there was no other distinct point of view which . . . a separate Labour Party might embody."[2]

In the 'Khaki' Election held later in 1900, the L.R.C. put forward only fourteen candidates, having been caught unawares by having to fight an election so soon after its formation. Nevertheless, it gathered over 60,000 votes [compared with the I.L.P.'s record of fewer than that total with twice as many candidates in 1895] and won two seats: Richard Bell in Derby and Keir Hardie in Merthyr Tydfil. It may have been true, as Halevy alleges, that "the vast majority of the trade unionists still regarded the experiment

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1. Cole, G. D. H.: British Working-Class Politics, 1832-1914, London, 1941, p. 158.

2. Lamb, op. cit., p. 652.

with hostility or indifference."[1] Not more than 500,000 [Halévy's estimate is 335,000] unionists had been represented at the meeting which formed the L.R.C. and many unions such as the miners remained aloof. The L.R.C. unions tended to be small and rather unimportant ones. Nevertheless, the infant Labour Party was a healthy and growing child. Only eight Lib-Labs were returned in 1900, a drop of three compared to the record of fifteen years before. The L.E.A. had expired, the Lib-Lab leaders were growing old and were not listened to with nearly as much attention as had once been the case. A Labour movement independent of the Liberal Party was at last a reality and was to grow quickly in the coming years.

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There were so many events in working-class history between 1880 and 1900 and so many contradictory strands that it is difficult to separate definite trends from the mass of facts which are present. Nevertheless, certain broad tendencies are clear. It is easiest to divide the period into four parts. In the first, between 1880 and 1885, the Liberal-Labour movement grew into manhood. Trade unions were aristocratic, conservative and somnolent, and lagged behind not only the middle-class Socialist groups but also behind the Social Radicalism of Joseph Chamberlain and Sir

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1. Halévy, op. cit., p. 264.

Charles Dilke. Between 1886 and 1890, renewed prosperity brought greater and more aggressive demands, and the New Unionism sprang up as a protest against the exclusiveness of the old Unions and the conservative policies of Henry Broadhurst and the T.U.C. At the same time, the start of independent labour political action took place, notably with Keir Hardie's intervention in the Mid-Lanark by-election of 1888 and the consequent formation of the Scottish Labour Party in the same year. Between 1891 and 1895 the bubble of the New Unionism burst; in any event the New Unions' memberships were unstable and claims of vast increases in organisation were often inflated. The T.U.C., however, was gradually forced in a collectivist direction, though it relapsed back into the old orthodoxy in 1895. Political action took a long stride forward with the election of three Labour independents in 1892 and the formation of the Independent Labour Party in the following year. Robert Blatchford and _The Clarion_ appealed to ordinary working people in a manner similar to the I.L.P. though the latter had a religious element foreign to Blatchford. The publication of _Merrie England_ in 1894 vastly increased the Socialist appeal. In the last period, 1896-1900, employer intransigeance and adverse court rulings served to rub home the lesson of lost strikes and even conservative trade unionists were forced to realise the necessity of a labour party independent of Liberalism. Furthermore, the death of Gladstone, Liberal

divisions, and the Boer War tended to weaken the Liberal-Labour alliance. Over the whole period the lack of enthusiasm manifested by Liberals, especially the constituency Liberal parties, towards the Labour alliance weakened the Lib-Labs and vitiated the effectiveness of the Labour Electoral Association, which accordingly died out in 1895-6. The general indifference of the Liberals when in office to Labour demands was specially notable in the 1892-95 period.

The last two chapters have examined the revolt of some members of the middle and working classes against Liberalism. This revolt was far from complete by 1900 but it was clearly present and growing. We shall now return to the Liberal Party itself and try to ascertain why the demands of the Socialist and collectivist forces could not be met by Liberalism. In short, the Liberal decline between 1880 and 1900 was largely due to the inability of the Liberal Party to become a Party rapidly evolving towards Socialism. Why was this the case?

CHAPTER 5

THE END OF THE LIBERAL HEGEMONY, 1881-1886

The year 1881, the Annual Register said, began badly, as if the first weeks of the New Year were to be a sad augury for the fortunes of the Liberal Government. Immediately Parliament met the Prime Minister announced that the Transvaal was not immediately to be granted self-government, a statement met with indignation by the "Little England" Radicals, among whom Sir Wilfred Lawson and Henry Labouchere were perhaps the most prominent spokesmen in the House of Commons, with John Morley their most influential supporter outside. Misled by bungling representatives, the Government thought that a policy of federation of the four white states [Cape Colony, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State] under British supremacy could quickly be enacted, thus carrying forward the intentions of Sir Bartle Frere, who had been recalled in August, 1880, in answer to Radical protests. Even though this policy had been emphatically rejected by the Transvaal delegates, Kruger and Joubert, as long ago as June 25, 1880, the Government was taken by surprise when at the end of 1880 the enraged Boers, who had thought that the Liberal victory the previous spring would mean their immediate independence, revolted. After several minor skirmishes, Sir George Colley and rather less than 100 British soldiers were killed at Majuba Hill on February 27, while negotiations with the

insurgents were actually being carried on. Here was a serious reverse for the Liberal Government. The imperialist spirit which had been roused by the opportunist Beaconsfield was far from being dead, and Magnus says that "the news of a humiliating reverse touched off an explosion of that Jingo sentiment which Gladstone was doing his best to exorcise."[1] Coming quickly to a truer appreciation of the situation, the Prime Minister acted more reasonably, and the negotiations resulted, early in August, in the Convention of Pretoria, a notable mark in colonial statesmanship. Rendering to the Boers something near virtual autonomy, the Convention might have been a rich jewel in the Government's crown, had not it followed so hard upon military reverse. "The Government," Morley points out, "had conceded to three defeats what they had refused to three times as many petitions, memorials, and remonstrances."[2]

Though Majuba and its consequences hurt the Government, and though mistrust of a non-imperialist foreign policy was growing in the country, it was not foreign or colonial affairs which damaged the Government most severely in 1881. Again and ever the problem which was most difficult to solve was the Irish one. Early in January the Irish Chief Secretary announced a severe "Coercion" Bill, one which, as we have seen, had seriously divided the Cabinet in the last months of 1880. Forster in introducing the Bill dwelt upon the increase in

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1. Magnus, /Sir/ Philip: Gladstone, London, 1954, p. 286.
2. Morley, John /Lord/: Life of Gladstone, vol. 3, London, 1903, p. 41.

agrarian outrages which had taken place in Ireland. Though many of his "outrages" consisted of threatening letters, yet it was clear that 1880 had witnessed more civil unrest in Ireland than any year since famine conditions had stirred the country in 1884.

But the Irish could not be expected to accept this new, drastic step of repression without opposition. Though fewer than half of their members were Nationalists [30 to 40 consistently supported Parnell], the insurgents soon revealed themselves to be masters of the fine art of obstruction. Before 1880, Irishmen had been noted for their ability to stand together; now, under Parnell's iron grip, many of them held firm. This new situation was the more remarkable in view of the fact that Parnell belonged to the "Ascendancy" class and was a Protestant. Nonetheless, he possessed a cold, yet magnetic personality which fascinated and compelled Irishmen as much as it repelled the English, and which made his origins, religion, and occupation, that of a Wicklow landowner, seem unimportant. Aided by a few Radical M.P.'s, notably Lawson and Labouchere, the Irish fought aggressively and valiantly. Among others, they quickly alienated old John Bright, once a good friend of Ireland and until the close of 1880 an unyielding foe of "coercion". But Bright, as his biographers have noticed, had much of the "John Bull" about him, and his pride and age combined to render him from this time forward a bitter and influential enemy of the Nationalist

Irish cause. This enmity was soon to be of sad but great consequence to Irish and English Liberals alike.

A twenty-two hour sitting of the House of Commons was forced by the Irishmen, and shortly afterwards, on January 31-February 2, a forty-one hour sitting was caused. Nothing like this had ever been known before; obstruction, to be sure, had taken place, nor had Mr. Gladstone, the Grand Old Man himself, refrained from using it, long before his days of premiership. But the length, the energetic ferocity, and the determined ability of the relatively small group of Irishmen, caused a sensation. Even greater, perhaps, was the sensation caused when, on February 2, acting on his own initiative, Speaker Brand ended the debate. Taken unawares, the obstructionists did not quite know what course next to follow, but the effervescent Labouchere leaped to his feet and demanded by what authority the Speaker had acted. Pale but resolute, Brand indicated that an unwonted state of affairs had arisen, and "a new and exceptional course is imperatively demanded."[1] The Bill then proceeded more smoothly, but not without pangs of anguish from advanced Liberals, who realised that "Coercion" was an anti-Liberal measure, and who noted that the Bill was far more warmly supported by Whigs and Tories than by their own Radical legions. On February 3, almost as if in retaliation, Michael Davitt, the Irish Land League leader, was

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1. The Annual Register, 1881, pp. 46-7.

re-arrested, and shortly afterwards John Dillon was bodily ejected from the House after a tumultuous scene. On the second of March the Crimes Bill became law, and on the 24th a supplementary Arms Bill was passed. Together, the two measures had taken up virtually three months of Parliamentary time, and thirty-six Irish members had been suspended.

After repression, kindness. On April 7th the Prime Minister brought the Irish Land Bill before the House. This Bill, called by the Annual Register "probably the most important measure introduced into the House of Commons since the passing of the Reform Bill,"[1] met with the strongest opposition from the Conservatives and from some Whigs. On the day following the introduction of the Bill the Duke of Argyll resigned his Cabinet position of Lord Privy Seal. "This step was regarded," the Annual Register said, "as evidence of the widening breach between the two schools of politics represented in the Cabinet, and also that the Duke of Argyll still clung to those economical theories with reference to land tenure which had been current amongst Liberals in the earlier part of the century."[2] The Duke's withdrawal was followed by other Whig opposition; now began in earnest the retreat of the noble families from the

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1. Ibid., p. 78.

2. Ibid., p. 89.

Liberal party. Lord Hartington's biographer remarks of his attitude at this time: "The Bill was almost as distasteful to the heir of the Cavendishes as it was to the chief of the Campbells."[1] To Gladstone he wrote on April 6: "I find it a hard morsel to swallow."[2]

The Bill was intended to establish the famous "three F's" in Ireland: Free Sale, Fixity of Tenure, and Fair Rents. Land courts were to be set up to review rents and to fix them at a fair level. The Tories thought this plan - which in effect took a step towards Socialism - evil and opposed to the interests of property, in which thought they were undoubtedly justified, while many Radicals felt that it did not go far enough. Morley later wrote: "The history of the session was described as the carriage of a single measure by a single man. Few British members understood it, none mastered it. The Whigs were disaffected about it, the Radicals doubted it, the Tories thought that property as a principle was ruined by it, the Irishmen, when the humour seized them, bade him to send the Bill to line trunks."[3] Well has the Bill been called Gladstone's leading legislative achievement. The Irishmen had a difficult course to follow, as either co-operation or opposition, if carried to extremes, would tend to injure them.

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1. Holland, Bernard: Life of Devonshire, vol. 1, London, 1911, p. 340.

2. Ibid., p. 340.

3. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 54.

In the circumstances they decided to fight the Bill, and 40 Irishmen opposed its second reading. Eight hundred and thirty-four amendments were proposed; 374 by dissident Liberals of the Right or Left, 260 by the Irish, 200 by the Tories. After 58 sittings, the Bill was finally passed toward the end of August.

But the Government's Irish troubles for 1881 were still not settled. The Nationalists set out to test the new Act, embittered by their failure to add favourable amendments to it, especially in regard to tenants' arrears of payments. Instead of calming the agitation, the Land Act appeared to strengthen it, and Parnell himself made speeches condemnatory of the Government. Offended, Liberal opinion became hostile, most notably in the person of Gladstone himself, who not unnaturally felt himself to possess a vested interest in the Act's success. At Leeds, on the seventh of October, the Prime Minister launched a severe attack on the Irish leader, warning him in celebrated words that "the resources of civilisation are not yet exhausted." Stung by these words, Parnell replied a few days later at Wexford, terming the Grand Old Man "this masquerading knight-errant, this pretending champion of the rights of every other nation except those of the Irish nation."[1] Roused now to fury, a Cabinet meeting endorsed Forster's plan to take action against Parnell, and

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1. Hammond, J. L., and Foot, M. R. D.: **Gladstone and Liberalism**, London, 1952, p. 145.

on October 13th he, Dillon, Sexton, O'Kelly, and the principal leaders of the Land League [except Davitt, who had been in Dartmoor prison since February] were arrested. On his way to Kilmainham gaol, Parnell "had been asked . . . who would take his place, and he had replied: 'Captain Moonlight.'"[1]

Captain Moonlight was now indeed to become the master of the resurgent Irish nation. Upon Parnell's imprisonment the Land League issued a "No Rent Manifesto", and although Parnell later ruefully declared that only his own tenants had obeyed the Manifesto, crime increased apace. "In the nine months between January and October, 1881," Hammond writes, "there had been 46 agrarian outrages, consisting of 9 murders, 5 cases of manslaughter, and 32 of firing at the person. . . . In the six months between October, 1881, and April, 1882, there had been no less than 75 agrarian outrages, 14 murders, and 61 cases of firing at the person."[2]

Relations between Ireland and England were now at their worst. Parnell was the symbol of a deathly antagonism between the two nations, and the news of his arrest aroused conflicting emotions. Of the English reaction Parnell's biographer writes: " . . . . The defeat of a foreign fleet at the mouth of the Thames could scarcely have exerted a

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1. Hammond, J. L.: Gladstone and the Irish Nation, London, 1938, p. 253.

2. Ibid., pp. 266-7.

greater ferment than the simple announcement that . . . Parnell was safe and sound under lock and key. The British Empire breathed once more."[1] But in Ireland: "In many towns and villages the shops were closed, and the streets wore the appearance of sorrow and mourning."[2]

So sadly and ominously had the curtain been rung down on the year 1881. Ireland had taken up almost the whole of the year's legislative work, and the legislation passed in its name seemed harmful rather than beneficial. A defeat in Africa had occurred, and at home only a weak closure Act and the abolition of flogging in the armed forces, agreed to in principle years before, had been passed. None of the measures envisaged in the Queen's Speech, which included, among other proposals, Irish County Councils, reform of the Bankruptcy laws, and a Corrupt Practices Act, were passed, while relations between the various species of Liberals were becoming increasingly exacerbated. Chamberlain, for example, came close to resigning twice in 1881. A contemporary observer wrote in 1881: "There is something very incongruous in the spectacle of the moderate Liberals making common cause with the Radicals against the Conservatives, with whom, upon all the fundamental principles of Government, they are almost

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1. O'Brien, R. Barry: <u>Life of Parnell</u>, vol. 1, London, 1899, p. 317.

2. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 317.

entirely at one."[1] Weakened and uncertain, the Liberal Party faced the future.

The year 1882 brought no cheerier fortune for the Party, which was now becoming increasingly bogged down in two places: Egypt and the never-to-be-forgotten Ireland. The Queen's Speech, read on the seventh of February, called for English and Welsh County Councils, reform of London Government and other legislation carried over from 1881 like Bankruptcy and Patents Acts and a Corrupt Practices Act. The local government schemes were of great and increasing moment to the Radical section, and it was hoped by the Government that their enactment would satisfy some of the Radicals, whose pressure grew ever stronger. Instead, however, the Government became again immersed in overseas and Irish troubles, and the Radical rumble of discontent grew louder.

At the end of 1881, Arabi Pasha, an Egyptian army officer, had led an uprising against the corrupt government of the Khedive, an uprising which was equally a protest against the great role of foreign financial interests in Egypt. At first British Liberals were inclined to support Arabi, at least in theory, but soon they began to worry about the excesses of the revolt. On June 11, 1882, riots took place in Alexandria during which fifty foreigners were killed and the British

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1. Young, W. V. K.: Liberalism in England, London, 1881, p. 5.

Consul was wounded. The Liberal Government had taken over the problem of Egypt only unwillingly, resigned that here, as in South Africa and elsewhere, the Disraelian imperial schemes could not immediately be reversed. Speaking in the House of Commons three days later, Gladstone supported "established rights in Egypt", including "those of the foreign bondholders."[1] "The inclusion of this last group was so unexpected," Garratt adds drily, "that Egyptian bonds immediately rose three points."[2] A month later, on July 11, the British fleet bombarded Alexandria, after an ultimatum to Arabi had been unanswered, and on September 13 the battle of Tel-el-Kebir took place, in which the Egyptian nationalists suffered an overwhelming defeat.

The actions in Egypt had done the Government some good in certain places, chiefly in the imperialist press and with the Whigs; thus Magnus says the Government received "a fillip of which it stood greatly in need."[3] But, far more important, the aggressive measures had harmed the Government's prestige in the House and in the country with a considerable number of Radicals. On July 15, four days after the bombardment of Alexandria, old John Bright resigned, and his example, while it did not lead to a major Radical censure of

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1. Garratt, G. T.: The Two Mr. Gladstones, London, 1936, p. 187.

2. Ibid., p. 187.

3. Magnus, op. cit., p. 291.

the Government was nevertheless a keen blow. Justin McCarthy, the Irish Nationalist, Member of Parliament and writer, who was an acute and popular historian of contemporary British politics wrote: "There can be no doubt that Mr. Bright's declaration expressed the opinions and sentiments of a large number of English Radicals."[1] Joseph Chamberlain, not yet the rabid imperialist which he was later to become, rather inclined towards Bright's view without going so far as to feel it to be cause for resignation. A decade later Chamberlain wrote: "If Mr. Bright had led an agitation against [the Egyptian intervention] I believe he would have been able to destroy the Government."[2] But the most serious consequence of the Egyptian venture lay in the fact that now, finally and irrevocably, the Government was committed to a "forward" policy in Egypt. Now the lines of battle were drawn and now the path was charted to the tragedy which culminated in 1885 at Khartoum.

To return to Ireland; it was apparent early in 1882 that Coercion was no answer. As we have already seen, agrarian outrages rose rather than declined after the passing of the Crimes Act, despite Forster's exuberance in locking up agitators, largely innocent. Gladstone as well as the

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1. McCarthy, Justin: A History of Our Own Times, vol. 5, London, 1897, p. 124.

2. Howard, C. H. D. [ed.]: Joseph Chamberlain, a Political Memoir, London, 1953, p. 81.

Radicals had always hated coercion and was now looking for an alternative. Parnell himself also wanted release from Kilmainham gaol, for two reasons. In Ireland the removal of the Nationalist leader had resulted in the growth of secret societies specialising in terror and outrage, going far beyond the constitutional proposals of Parnell himself. Hammond says: ". . . . An Anarchy was spreading more dangerous to the Government than the agrarian agitations, but more dangerous also to Parnell."[1] These groups the leader was naturally anxious to quell. There was a personal reason as well for his desire to be released. Since 1880 his mistress had been Katharine O'Shea, wife of an Irish Member of Parliament, Captain William O'Shea. His prolonged absence from Mrs. O'Shea was a severe blow to them both, especially as she had given birth to his baby in February.

By one of those cruel strokes of unkind Fate which often strike at politicians and which seemed especially prevalent during this Governent, Captain O'Shea was a vain and arrogant man, who imagined himself a politician of major importance. He was detested by his wife and by Parnell, as well as by the vast majority of the Irish party, but this did not prevent him from attempting to act as intermediary between the Irish and the Government. In mid-April O'Shea wrote a

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1. Hammond, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 264.

letter to Joseph Chamberlain, in whom he professed to have great confidence as a Radical and a defender of the rights of the Irish people.[1] At the risk of his political career, Chamberlain, with Cabinet authorisation, entered into negotiations with O'Shea, the result of which was, by the end of the month, resolved into the famous "Kilmainham Treaty".

The complications of this "Treaty" were manifold. From the first Parnell tried to replace the inept and conceited O'Shea by Justin McCarthy, a man of great discretion and probity. But Chamberlain preferred to deal directly with O'Shea, to his own, his party's, and the Parnellites' ineradicable loss. Rarely, if ever, can two unimportant people have played so large and so tragic a role in British politics as the peacock Captain O'Shea and his well-meaning but tragically star-crossed wife. Unable to act as discreetly with O'Shea as intermediary as with the reliable McCarthy, Parnell wrote a letter to the Captain, the last paragraph of which said in part that the release of the Irish leaders and an effective Arrears Act "would, I feel, soon enable us to co-operate cordially for the future with the Liberal Party in forwarding Liberal principles and measures of general reform, and that the Government at the end of the session, would, from the state of the country, feel themselves

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1. O'Shea wrote: "You appear to be a minister without political pedantry." Garvin, J. C.: Life of Chamberlain, vol. 1, London, 1932, p. 350.

thoroughly justified in dispensing with further coercive measures."[1] It is pointless to argue whether or not the Kilmainham compact constituted a "treaty". While there was no signed and sealed document, Parnell's authorised biographer sums up the situation crisply and concisely: "It has been said that there was no Kilmainham Treaty. Well, it is idle to quibble about words. There was a Kilmainham Treaty, and these, in a single sentence, were its terms. The Government were to introduce a satisfactory arrears bill, and Parnell was to 'slow down' the agitation."[2] But it would be slander to call the agreement "treachery", or a "corrupt political bargain". It was rather an attempt on the part of the Government to relax repression and simultaneously to secure Irish reforms with Irish co-operation.

By the beginning of May, the Cabinet had determined to accept Parnell's terms and to launch on a new policy of amnesty and co-operation with the Irish. This policy was not endorsed by all of the Liberal Ministers; the Whigs were affrighted and indignant. Hartington, the most prominent Whig, opposed the change of policy; his biographer remarks: "Lord Hartington, never having made the 'new departure' in the same sense, still stood on the shore which

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1. Reid, [Sir] T. Wemyss, Life of Forster, vol. 2, London, 1888, p. 438.

2. O'Brien, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 350.

his leader had quitted."[1] Which is to say that the Whigs refused, as before, to contemplate new action to meet acute social problems without the greatest reluctance. But it was Forster himself who rightly regarded the Kilmainham Treaty as a blow to his work and his prestige, and who immediately resigned. Forster, Justin McCarthy remarks, "Used to boast that he had every dangerous person in Ireland under lock and key. He only failed in imprisoning the few real criminals."[2] He resigned at the beginning of May, and delivered the usual Ministerial resignation speech on May 4th, a reasoned attack on the new policy and a defence of himself, but saying nothing about a treaty or blackmail. On the same day, Parnell and the other Irish leaders were released from Kilmainham and Michael Davitt was released from Dartmoor.

Now tragedy struck cruelly at the new policy of kindness and reconciliation. It had been thought on many sides, in fact assumed, that Joseph Chamberlain would succeed Forster as Irish Chief Secretary. To his pique he was not appointed, chiefly because Gladstone in his withdrawal from popular Liberal opinion did not consider him. Hammond notes: "Nobody who knew . . . the composition of the 'conclave' at which the choice of a successor was discussed, would have

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 359.

2. McCarthy, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 93.

expected it to be Chamberlain. The members were Spencer, Hartington, and Richard Grosvenor /the Liberal Chief Whip/. It would be difficult to say which of these eminent Whigs would have disliked Chamberlain's appointment most."[1] Partly too the reason was due to an unhappy incident, an attack from the Radical press. In the <u>Pall Mall Gazette</u> John Morley, at this time unquestionably the leading Radical journalist, scholar, and political thinker, had published an emphatic and effective attack on the Forster policy. Unfortunately, however, he had in the same article proposed Chamberlain as the new Chief Secretary; as Morley was politically and personally intimate with Chamberlain the Whigs mistakenly assumed that the latter was thus advancing his own case and reacted strongly against him. In any event the new Chief Secretary was Lord Frederick Cavendish. Cavendish was a curious phenomenon in politics. Although the brother of Lord Hartington, he was no dyed-in-the-wool Whig, especially in Irish matters, where he was not at all loath to countenance a "new departure". Cavendish was useful as a means of reconciliation between his brother and the Prime Minister, and his subsequent death meant that relations between the two men became increasingly distant and confused. He had also the gift of popularity; he was liked on all sides of the House, and almost universally admired, and though he had had

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1. Hammond, p. 281.

little experience, and though the news of his appointment was received, the Annual Register said, "with mingled incredulity and surprise,"[1] yet he sailed for Ireland with the high hopes of all shades of Liberals [except, possibly, Forster] behind him.

The tragedy which followed is famous. On Saturday, May 6, the day after his arrival, Cavendish and T. H. Burke, his permanent undersecretary, were murdered while strolling in Phoenix Park, Dublin, adjacent to the Viceregal Lodge. The tragedy of the murders was not made entirely clear until later; it was Burke whom the assassins had sought out; Cavendish they had killed simply because he was trying to defend his associate, without even knowing who he was. The murders were committed by an organisation known as "the Invincibles", a terrorist society with which Parnell and his followers had no connection in any way. Here was a striking condemnation of the miserably inadequate policy of "coercion" and of the folly of gaoling Parnell. One of the tragedies of the Irish situation lay in the fact that almost none of the Liberals [though Gladstone was beginning to change his mind] at this time realised that Parnell could in fact become their best friend, not their foe. Had they acted earlier on this assumption British and Irish history as well as Liberal Party history might have been very different. But although

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1. Annual Register, 1882, p. 52.

Burke, not Cavendish, had been the intended victim, although Parnell knew nothing about "the Invincibles" and went white with terror upon hearing the news of the murders, these considerations made no difference. Parnell feared that the next blow would be aimed at himself, offered to Gladstone to resign his seat [a magnanimous gesture as magnanimously refused by the premier], and cried in anguish: "How can I conduct a popular agitation if they stab me in the back this way?" He had stopped the manifestations of the Ladies' Land League which had flourished while he was in prison under the leadership of his sister and was acting as a definitely moderating force. J. L. Garvin, who may by no stretch of imagination be called an admirer of Parnell points out acutely: ". . . We must always remember that the far-sighted, daring moderation of the Kilmainham compact had strained his authority to the limit. All his perfervid, unseeing lieutenants talked of his 'surrender'."[1]

The first shock of the murders in Phoenix Park had stunned the nation. Perhaps two factors contributed to the moderation which immediately followed. First, Cavendish had been so well-liked by so many people that the news of his assassination created at first a dazed shock and sympathy rather than maneuverings for political capital. His wife was Mrs. Gladstone's niece, and the Prime Minister, it was well known, had regarded Cavendish as a son. Secondly, immediately after

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1. Garvin, J. L.: Life of Chamberlain, vol. 1, London, 1932, p. 364.

the catastrophe Lady Frederick issued a statement of great courage and conciliation, in which she proclaimed her hope that her personal loss might be to the gain of both Great Britain and Ireland.

But this first mood wore off quickly. A new debate followed in the House of Commons, on May 15-16, and the Tories reverting to Kilmainham were quick to make charges of a "treaty with murderers", while Gladstone rather over-subtly denied that there had been a treaty. Parnell proceeded to read his letter to Captain O'Shea, but deleted the compromising sentences quoted above. At this point Forster intervened, and in stark silence read the missing paragraph. Of the effect, T. M. Healy, the Irish nationalist, later wrote: "The House of Commons has known many dramatic moments, but in my thirty-eight years there I never felt such emotion as at that interruption. Parnell paled. Gladstone's face mantled with pious indignation. Chamberlain sat erect like a soldier who knew that the password had not been rightly rendered and that the guardroom yawned for a culprit."[1]

The effect of Forster's dramatic intervention and the debate itself is easy to imagine. Gone was the hope of settling the Irish problem amicably on generous terms. Gone was the Liberal Party's chance of achieving reconciliation while it had an effective majority. Gone was any faint

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1. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 369.

support for the new policy which the Whigs had at first entertained, the hardening of their attitude reinforced by the fact that the principal victim had been Hartington's brother. Gone, in fact, was the policy of reconciliation itself. Never again was there to be the chance to settle the Irish question which had existed on May 5, 1882. The Liberal Party suffered a tremendous blow from the situation created by the combination of Kilmainham and Phoenix Park; if the fortunes of a party may be compared to those of an army, the names of Kilmainham and Phoenix Park may be compared to Jena or Austerlitz.

"Coercion", of course, followed, a Crimes Act far stronger than any which had been contemplated before the murders. Its leading exponent in the Cabinet was Harcourt, the Home Secretary, who had to deal with bombing outrages and security arrangements and who from now until 1885 was the foremost Liberal supporter of repression. He is said to have observed that once the 'caviare' of coercion was tried it became ever easier to take more. In vain were the attempts of Gladstone and Chamberlain in the Cabinet, Radicals and Irish in the House, to lessen the severity of the Bill, except in a few instances. By the end of July, despite implacable opposition and obstruction from the Parnellites, the Bill had become law.

On the other hand, on the 10th of August the promised Arrears Act, reducing rents by an average of 20 per cent,

was passed. Its passage was again due largely to Gladstone's efforts, and of it Hammond remarks: "The first two Land Acts, 1870 and 1881, were disappointing in their immediate results. The third Act, the Arrears Act of 1882, succeeded at once . . . . Out of 135,997 claims under the Act no less than 129,952 were allowed."[1] But the chance of pacifying Ireland by the Arrears Act was gone after "Coercion" had also become law. The country at large and most Liberals as well were sick of Ireland and Irish problems and feelings between the two nations were perhaps embittered now as never before. A final blow was the incidence on August 17 of the Maamtrasna massacre, perhaps the most horrible of all the Irish agrarian crimes. In an out-of-the-way, backward area of Ireland a family of six were attacked while sleeping by ten men, and only one, a small child, survived his wounds. The Liberals suffered doubly from this tragedy; first in England when the crime was made known, and secondly in subsequent years in Ireland where it was maintained that an innocent man had been hanged as one of the murderers and the refrain "Who killed Myles Joyce?" became a Nationalist watchword.

The year 1882 ended in unhappiness and frustration. A few minor pieces of legislation had been passed, useful in themselves, but unimportant; it would be difficult to rally

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1. Hammond, p. 304.

Radical support to proclaim the Married Women's Property Act, the Electric Lighting Act [which was soon to prove harmful rather than helpful], procedural reforms, or the Settled Land Act as great legislative achievements. At the end of the year very little had been accomplished, feelings were exacerbated on all sides, and the Liberal Party appeared to be in a state of drift. As Maccoby writes, the year had been a "gloomy and fruitless one". John Morley wrote about this time: "We are all living from hand to mouth, without chart, compass, or creed; Mr. Gladstone is an opportunist of one sort; Mr. Chamberlain an opportunist of another sort. We are all at sea."[1]

The situation was the worse because the Cabinet was known to be divided at the end of 1882 over Irish decentralisation, or County Councils, which Gladstone, strongly supported by Chamberlain, felt to be imperative. Gladstone in a letter to Clémenceau which was widely read said that "we are now going to produce a state of things which will make the humblest Irishman realise that he is a governing agency, and that the government is to be carried on by him and for him."[2] His son, Herbert Gladstone, called for Irish local government in a speech at Leeds, and Chamberlain declared: "So long as Ireland is without any institution of local government worthy of the name, so long the seeds of discontent and

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1. Christie, O. F.: The Transition to Democracy, London, 1934, pp. 77-8.
2. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 363.

disloyalty will remain only to burst forth into luxurious growth at the first favourable season."[1] In a speech in early January, 1883, however, Hartington expressed the prevailing Whig opinion: "It would be madness, in my opinion, to give Ireland more extended self-government unless we can receive from the Irish people some assurance that this boon would not be used for the purposes of agitation."[2] In another speech in January, 1883, Hartington repudiated Herbert Gladstone's speech, but the next day Chamberlain made a famous speech comparing Ireland under English rule to Poland under the Russians, thus bringing the Radical-Whig cleavage unmistakably before the public eye. Hartington in a letter to Granville frankly called Gladstone's plans "dreams"[3] and the result of the dissension was that Irish local government was mentioned only vaguely and ambiguously in the Queen's speech and then dropped.

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The years 1883 and 1884 were in large part lost years as far as Liberal progress at home, abroad, or in Ireland was concerned. The two years may properly be called years of watchful waiting for disaster, except for one major measure and several omens of sad import to the Liberals for the future. Some of the omens were more important than others, but the more significant of them are touched upon here.

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 383-4.
2. Holland, vol. 1, p. 384.
3. Holland, vol. 1, p. 390.

(1) Very little was done towards solving the Irish problem, the major achievements being measures to help the agricultural labourer and the homeless or slum-dwellers. Parnell, partly due to the liaison with Mrs. O'Shea, was very quiet during 1883 and 1884, under the stern [though, unlike Forster's, discreet] hand of Lord Spencer, the Irish Viceroy, outrages were declining, and as observed above, Englishmen were weary of the Irish imbroglio. "Two years had been spent in Irish problems while English reforms had been put aside. Parliament had given up to Ireland in 1881 the most strenuous session that had ever tried the nerves and the endurance of the House of Commons. In 1882 the Local Government Bill and the London Government Bill had been postponed once more that Parliament might pass the Arrears Act and give the Irish peasants rights unknown in England. The autumn had been devoted to the reform of procedure and the setting up of two Grand Committees on legal and constitutional questions . . . . When Ireland was mentioned, England was like a man with the gout."[1]

In the summer of 1883, Sir William Harcourt, ~~had,~~ by panic methods, succeeded in the unprecedented feat of passing an Explosives Act through both Houses of Parliament in two nights, one in each House. This Act, designed to protect the British population against Irish outrages, was something

1. Hammond, pp. 325-6.

less than an unqualified success, for all the really important bombings took place after its enactment. On January 24, 1884, Tower Bridge and the Houses of Parliament were bombed, and shortly afterwards Pall Mall, Scotland Yard, and London Bridge were also bombed. But these displays of violence did not result in any action by the Liberal leaders or by Parliament; so deep was the apathy and distrust felt by Englishmen for the Irish that nothing was done, in marked contrast to the example set by Napoleon III after the Orsini attempt.

(2) In February, 1883, a by-election in Newcastle-upon-Tyne resulted in the election of John Morley, the beginning of a distinguished twenty-five year career in the House of Commons. Morley, as we have seen, was prominent as a leader of the Social Radicals [though in fact his Radicalism was to prove closer to that of Bright and the older school], and few men if any were prepared to go further in supporting Radical reform than he. This being so, Morley would appear to be an ideal man for a Radical, working-class area like Newcastle. Such, however, was not the case. Commenting on the by-election, the Annual Register for 1883 noted "the . . . open discontent of the working men, who desired to send to Parliament a member of their own body."[1] If so eminent a middle-class Radical as Morley no longer satisfied the working class, the Liberal Party would do well to mark the

1. ~~McCarthy, vol. 5,~~ p. 69.

trend and encourage working-class candidates in subsequent elections. But, as we have already seen, nothing of the sort was to happen on any wide scale.

(3) The Bradlaugh problem had pursued the Government each year since 1880, and in 1883 Gladstone determined to end the situation once for all with an Affirmation Bill. Though it was supported by strong speeches from the Prime Minister and others, 40 Liberals declined to vote and 17 actually opposed the Bill, with the result that it was defeated in the House by three votes, 292 to 289. It was small wonder that the 1883 Annual Register recorded Radical displeasure and impatience with the Government and wrote: "The position of the Liberal Party between Easter and Whitsuntide, it was freely admitted, had not improved . . . . Disaster was anticipated if prompt and vigorous measures were not speedily adopted."[1] Gladstone was forced to hold a special party meeting late in May to discuss the situation and ask for support. The Radicals were specially displeased by the Parliamentary situation contrasted with their feeling of growing power in the country; in November Morley wrote: "Everything shows me more and more clearly that the working Liberals all over the country are Radical, and that the Whigs are done."[2]

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1. [illegible] p. 109.

2. Hirst, F. W.: Early Life and Letters of John Morley, vol. 2, London, 1927, p. 175.

(4) In April, 1883, the Government brought before the House of Commons a resolution intending to vote pensions for Lord Alcester and Sir Garnet [later Lord] Wolseley for their actions the previous summer at Alexandria and Tel-el-Kebir. Although the pensions were duly voted, Labouchere succeeded in summoning 77 Radical votes against the Alcester annuity, the action being a warning that the great mass of Radicals was strongly opposed to imperialist adventures. Only 209 votes were recorded for the Government on this issue, many of which came from Conservatives. Justin McCarthy wrote of the incident: "There can be no doubt that this debate in the House of Commons, following so closely on the resignation of Mr. Bright [it was, in fact, nine months later], tended much to weaken the authority of Mr. Gladstone's Government with some of the very men to whom he might most naturally have looked for support."[1]

(5) The Bright Jubilee took place at Birmingham in June, 1883, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the popular Bright as Member for Birmingham. The jubilee lasted a full week and was a huge demonstration, being called by the Annual Register for 1883 "the most imposing political manifestation of the year".[2] At the celebration, which in itself was feared as an example of mass democracy by timid

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1. McCarthy, vol. 5, p. 141.

2. [illegible] p. 139.

Whigs, Chamberlain revealed how vastly far ahead of Bright he stood in his Radicalism. Bright spoke mainly of the blessings of Free Trade, its prospects elsewhere, and the improved circumstances of the working classes, due largely, he said, to the Repeal of the Corn Laws. Referring to his Lancashire home Bright said that conditions had vastly improved for the workers in the workshop, in agriculture, and in the home. "These advances have been coming naturally and inevitably and necessarily from the growing wealth and growing prosperity of the country."[1] Throughout the speech Bright revealed a complacency and pride which Chamberlain's speech rudely ended. The ex-Mayor said amid cheers: "I do not often agree with Lord Salisbury - but I did agree with him when he said . . . that social reform was the great problem of our time; and the two most important branches of that reform are the better provision of dwellings for the working classes in the large towns and an improvement in the condition of the agricultural labourer in the counties. But those two reforms are out of the question until we can rise to an altogether higher conception of the so-called rights of property - until we can limit those rights in regard to the duties of property. That is impossible so long as property, and especially landed property, is able to enjoy a great majority in the House of Commons and a practical monopoly of the House of Lords."[2]

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1. Pall Mall Gazette, Extra No. 1, p. 8.

2. Ibid., p. 12.

Gone were the days when Radicals could be supporters of pure laissez-faire, and Chamberlain's speech was widely resented in conservative circles as being both an exposition of Social Radicalism and an attack upon monarchy as an institution.

(6) The junior Liberal Member for Brighton, W. T. Marriott, had for several years had a running feud with Chamberlain and the "Caucus", and the dissident's written and spoken complaints greatly abetted the Conservative attack. One typical article of his said: "That the Caucus has done incalculable harm to the Liberal Party, and for a time has seriously injured the advance of Liberal principles, there can be no serious doubt."[1] In February, 1884, Marriott finally severed his Liberal ties and the following month fought his seat as a Conservative. To the dismay of Liberals, he was re-elected by an increased majority [A few years later Marriott became a Unionist Minister]. Despite this manifestation it is probable that the "Caucus" did the Liberals far more good than harm. But in Whig and some other quarters it was viewed with suspicion and mistrust and was a source of serious intra-party friction.

(7) In January, 1884, Chamberlain in his capacity of President of the Board of Trade introduced a Merchant Shipping Bill in the House of Commons. In his speeches Chamberlain emphasised the many unnecessary losses at sea and the fact

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1. The Nineteenth Century, vol. 11, June, 1882, p. 960.

that about 3,580 men had perished the year before, largely in needless accidents. The Bill was intended to regulate conditions aboard ocean-going vessels and to establish a strict surveillance over the actions of the shipowners. It was fought by the owners tooth and nail, and their opposition was notable inasmuch as the majority of them [such as Charles Booth's family] were Liberals. Garvin observes: "Liberals engaged in the shipping interest, with a few shining exceptions, were just as bitter as nearly all Conservatives.. ."[1] Again, "letters and telegrams rained on the House of Commons urging Members to reject the Bill. Shipowners, nominally Liberal like Norwood of Hull, worked their hardest to beat it."[2] Disgusted by the absence of real Cabinet and Parliamentary support, Chamberlain offered his resignation in March, but was persuaded to stay on to fight for the passage of the coming Reform Bill. A Railways Regulation Bill also prepared by Chamberlain was not even heard by the House, and the Radical leader was left to wonder what the huge nominal Liberal majority actually meant in terms of legislation.

(8) Local and London Government were intended to be issues for legislation in 1882, 1883 and 1884. In the first of these years, as we have seen, Irish affairs were allowed to take precedence. In 1883 Harcourt drew up a Bill for

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1. Garvin, vol. 1, p. 423.

2. Ibid., p. 426.

London Government which foundered in the Cabinet and almost caused his resignation due to a controversy over the control of the Metropolitan Police, the conflict being between the supporters of the new London authority and the Home Secretary. In 1884 these differences in the Cabinet were resolved, and the Bill passed its second reading, but then no further progress was made. Dilke [who had joined the Cabinet as President of the Local Government Board in December, 1882] wrote darkly in his diary that no one in the House cared about the London Government Bill but himself, Firth, and Gladstone, "and no one outside the House except the Liberal electors of Chelsea."[1] The Annual Register commented that "this measure, which was to form the second great Bill of the session [the Franchise Act being the first], was destined to receive but scant attention, and its introduction into an almost deserted House might have been accepted as an omen of its subsequent neglected career . . . . By the press and public the scheme was received with lukewarm approbation, the Reformers accepting it only as an instalment of their demands and rights, whilst the Obstructives threatened the most determined opposition . . . "[2]

A tentative bill for reforming local Government was drawn up in August, 1883; Dilke, however, wrote in his diary that at a Cabinet of October 25: "Mr. Gladstone made a speech

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1. Gwynn, Stephen, and Tuckwell, Gertrude: Life of Dilke, vol. 2, London, 1917, pp. 10-11.
2. Annual Register, 1884, pp. 181-2.

about the next session which virtually meant franchise first, and the rest nowhere. After this I locked up my now useless Local Government Bill . . . "[1] In 1884 Dilke again took up the Bill, intended to reform local government both county and parish, and including Poor Law administration. But the Bill foundered even before being introduced in the House, due to opposition in the Cabinet and to the great amount of Parliamentary time taken by the Reform Bill. So perished the local government attempts of the Liberal Government.

(9) The Egyptian problem, never very far from the surface, burst again into an open wound after November 5, 1883, when Hicks Pasha, a retired British Army Colonel, with 10,000 untrained Egyptian soldiers was massacred in the Sudan at the "battle of Kashgil" [near Shekan] by the Army of the "Mahdi", or Messiah. The rising of the Mahdi had taken place since the end of 1881, when an unknown Sudanese had proclaimed himself ~~as~~ Mohammed's rightful heir as Mahdi and had collected a large, fanatic army. The defeat of Hicks occasioned an outcry at home, though he had not been acting under British authority. Thorold says: "Public opinion in England was deeply stirred by the disaster at Shekan, and one of those popular cries that are so often and so disastrously interpreted as heavenly voices went up all over the land. The nation called for Gordon."[2] The popular cry was

1. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 527.
2. Thorold, A. L.: Life of Labouchere, London, 1911, p. 193.

fostered and abetted in a manner typical of the new era by W. T. Stead in the Pall Mall Gazette, perhaps the first modern example of the effectiveness of a newspaper campaign. In January, 1884, a group of Ministers including Dilke, Northbrook, Granville and Hartington decided to send Gordon to the Sudan, a decision subsequently concurred in by Gladstone /who had been ill/ and the rest of the Cabinet. Gordon was told that his mission was to supervise the evacuation of the Sudan, not to occupy it, and to avoid collision with the army of the Mahdi. How Ministers could have been so deceived by the character and experience of Gordon as to think he would obey these instructions remains inexplicable to this day. The best excuse for their fumbling and for their absent-minded conduct in the next year is probably their pre-occupation with the Reform Bill coupled with the sincere determination of most of the Cabinet to avoid any further imperial adventures.

It is unnecessary here to discuss in detail the famous tragedy of Gordon and Khartoum. He was appointed Governor-General of the Sudan and proceeded to disobey all his instructions, as he himself acknowledged. Instead of evacuating the Sudan the headstrong General set out on a long march and occupied Khartoum, with the avowed intention of not leaving until the Mahdi's forces had been suppressed. Meanwhile at home an outcry was set up for an expedition to "rescue Gordon," a demand which the Prime Minister steadily refused during

most of 1884. The Cabinet was bitterly divided; Harcourt threatened to resign if a relief expedition were sent, while Selborne and Hartington threatened to resign if it were not. Finally in August after months of agitation the Grand Old Man and the Home Secretary were won over, and an expedition was sent under Sir Garnet Wolseley's leadership. Gordon's vain and prophetic character was best revealed in an entry in his journal and in a letter. In his journal Gordon wrote on September 19, 1884: "I know if _I_ was chief, I would never employ myself, for I am incorrigible."[1] The letter, written in November, 1884, to Sir Evelyn Baring [later Lord Cromer], British Consul-General in Egypt, said: "If any emissary or letter comes here ordering me to come down I WILL NOT OBEY IT, BUT WILL STAY HERE AND FALL WITH THE TOWN AND RUN ALL RISKS."[2] The Cabinet was in fact near to destruction over the entire affair, and in the late autumn of 1884 a scheme of Egyptian finance drawn up by Lord Northbrook again produced deadlock; Northbrook threatened to resign if his policy were not adopted, while Dilke threatened his resignation if it were, though in the event both resignations were averted. Small wonder that Granville's biographer wrote of late 1884 that "if the Ministry continued to exist at all, it was mainly owing to

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1. Magnus, _op. cit._, p. 314.

2. Garratt, _op. cit._, p. 238.

the personal exertions of Lord Granville."[1] The stage was now set for the disaster of Khartoum.

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The sole measure of great significance passed in 1883-4 was the Reform Act, nor was it enacted without many severe divisions among Liberals. In November and December, 1883, Hartington and Goschen made speeches opposing Reform, while Chamberlain was campaigning up and down the country demanding it on a wide scale. The Birmingham Radical found the country increasingly with him; at the end of the year, the Annual Register wrote: "The Radicals in office and in Parliament found their influence, seconded by their far-reaching organisation, so much increased that they were in a position to bring to the front the demand for a new Reform Bill."[2] Though Goschen's attitude was well-known and had kept him out of the 1880-85 Government, Hartington and Chamberlain were members of the same Cabinet, and their divergence was a grave matter. The heir of the Cavendishes was especially opposed to allowing the Irish to possess the suffrage on the same terms as the inhabitants of the other island, the more as Ireland was rather over-represented in any case, and he strongly advocated a form of minority representation. In a letter to Gladstone on December 2, 1883, Hartington wrote

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1. Fitzmaurice, [Lord] Edmond: Life of Granville, vol. 2, London, 1905, p. 380.

2. Annual Register, 1883, p. 188.

regretting that he had made a speech opposing reform without redistribution, but added: "Even if this premature disclosure of my opinions had not taken place, I do not think I could have been a party to a simple Franchise Bill for England and Scotland; more especially to one which will reduce the franchise in Ireland without providing any security whatever for the representation of the loyal minority in the Northern, and perhaps some other, constituencies."[1] The division in the Cabinet was well-known outside, and for a time the Tories made much sport of it. Hartington was desperately unhappy over the whole situation and wrote to Granville on December 2: " . . . I am terribly sick of office and seldom find myself in real agreement with my colleagues."[2] He knew that the Whigs had no basic objectives in common with the Social Radicals, and would have resigned had he not felt it vital not to leave the Whigs leaderless. Even so, speeches by Chamberlain in support of Reform in December, 1883, gravely offended him, and only the action of Gladstone in threatening his own resignation averted Hartington's. More surprisingly, John Bright declared himself unenthusiastic for a new, sweeping extension of the franchise.

The Act, increasing the electorate from three to five million, passed the Commons in June, 1884, without difficulty,

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 397.

2. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 397.

/though the Prime Minister felt it necessary to caution Chamberlain against unduly angering Hartington/, but then its real trial began. The Lords refused to pass it without a simultaneous scheme of Redistribution of Seats such as would afford them, in effect, minority representation; as Chamberlain put it, they wanted to keep their borough minorities while extinguishing the Liberal rural minorities. The action of the Lords, moreover, was a thinly-disguised attack on the idea of Reform itself, to which Salisbury was strongly opposed. This attitude was not unnaturally opposed by Radicals, and in the summer of 1884 a tremendous campaign was launched in the country against the Lords, partly as a deliberate reply to Lord Randolph Churchill's comment that insufficient popular enthusiasm had been displayed in favour of the Bill. Gladstone called a meeting of Liberals at the Foreign Office on July 10, two days after the Lords' rejection of the Bill, at which he said that Parliament would be prorogued at once, the rousing of popular opinion would take place throughout the summer, and a new session would meet again in the autumn. In the campaign the Social Radicals played a minor role, Chamberlain providing one slogan with his "Peers against the People", Morley another with "Mend them or End them".[1] Huge crowds gathered to support Reform everywhere; at Birmingham upwards of two hundred thousand people marched on August 4. Chamberlain's

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 465.

campaign was frowned on by the Court, and on July 26 Gladstone, in a letter tried gently to restrain him: "Upon examining your speech with my best spectacles I find a single passage which I should like to refer to you, as there are a few words in it, those about the 'future prospects' of the House of Lords, which I rather think may have been spoken inadvertently."[1] Chamberlain, however, refused to moderate his campaign, and huge demonstrations followed in Hyde Park and elsewhere. A day after the Birmingham meeting Dilke warned his friend of the Queen's displeasure, but Chamberlain replied: "She may, if she likes, dismiss me, in which case I will lead an agitation against the Lords in the country."[2] The Prime Minister himself also made many public speeches, though he did not attack the House of Lords as did the Radicals; the Annual Register reported his tour to Scotland: "Before reaching the Scottish border at every station where the train stopped he was met by enthusiastic crowds . . . At Edinburgh a most remarkable ovation awaited him: all business was stopped, the streets were filled with closely-packed enthusiastic crowds, and the whole way . . . was thronged by thousands . . . "[3] Its general comment on the campaign was:

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1. Ibid., p. 469.

2. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 470.

3. Annual Register, 1884, p. 202.

"In point of numbers, both of meetings and attendance, the Liberals showed an enormous preponderance . . . . Full d credit was due to the Liberal Party managers for arousing popular interest in every nook of the kingdom . . ."[1]

At the same time negotiations were being carried on between the Liberal and Conservative leaders, an unprecedented step partly undertaken by the initiative of Queen Victoria. The intricacies of the Redistribution wrangle, which almost caused Childers' resignation, do not concern us here; suffice it to point out that the Whigs were unhappy to an extreme about the vehemence and the popularity of the campaign led by the Social Radicals. Hartington's biographer makes his attitude clear: "Lord Hartington . . . held the same position as that occupied in the summer of 1884 by the House of Lords."[2] This attitude, held by the leader of a sizeable element in the Cabinet and in the Liberal Party, was a dark augury for the future. More important still, the Reform Act of 1884 meant the eventual end of the Whigs as a separate entity, partly due to the great influx of new voters and partly to the large-scale adoption of single-member constituencies which helped to end the practice of running a Radical and a Whig in double harness. Thus the inferior status to which the Whigs were reduced by the 1884

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1. Ibid., p. 208,

2. Holland, vol. 1, p. 404.

Act made them the more willing to leave their party two years later.

The Whigs had been disaffected and damaged by the Act; it succeeded in injuring the Radical leader as well. Lord Randolph Churchill with characteristic audacity had called a popular meeting to be held in Birmingham, at Aston Park, on October 13, in which the attitude of the Lords was intended to be upheld. The Birmingham adherents of Chamberlain naturally took umbrage at this invasion of the Radical citadel and rather unwisely decided to counter-attack by means of forged tickets and an invading Radical army. The inevitable result, with which Chamberlain had little to do, was a riot of serious proportions and a national scandal. Garvin points out: "the whole affair was a ghastly blunder. The nation rang with it. It gave a forward push to Tory Democracy in Birmingham and helped Conservatism throughout the country. It cast a cloud on Chamberlain's name, and . . . imperilled yet more seriously his position as a Minister."[1] A censure motion followed in the House of Commons, and was, despite Gladstone's defence of the Radical, defeated by only thirty-six votes, 214-178. Thus Chamberlain's reputation had emerged rather tarnished and soiled, and the effect of the Reform Bill had been even more than hitherto to divide the Liberal Party.

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 478.

The two years were not, however, without a few Acts of minor legislative importance. In 1883 Sir Henry James, the Attorney General, was responsible for the passing of the important but long-delayed Corrupt Practices Act, while Chamberlain carried through laws governing bankruptcy and patents. The Factory Acts were extended and an Agricultural Holdings Bill became law. In 1884, however, no act of permanent value was passed. An Irish land purchase Bill was brought in but dropped. Dilke, it is true, carried out some useful administrative work at the Local Government Board.[1] But with the single exception of the great Reform Act in 1884, no legislation worthy of any Liberal Government, let alone one sustained by the rapid growth of Social Radicalism, was passed. The verdict of Justin McCarthy is unquestionably justified: "The work of the House of Commons was reduced to a mere scramble, into which everybody rushed at the same time, and out of which nobody got anything that he wanted to have. We cannot recollect any time in which the effort at legislation was more barren of results and more bitter in the struggle than that which is illustrated by the history of Parliament

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1. One evidence of the backwardness of official Trade Unionism at this time was seen in the proceedings of a Royal Commission on Housing set up in 1884 and presided over by Dilke. Years later, he wrote: "Almost the only amusing incident which occurred in the course of many moths was Lord Salisbury making a rather wild suggestion, when Broadhurst [the T.U.C. secretary and ~~soon to be~~ a Lib-Lab M.P.] put down his pen, and, looking up in a pause, said with an astonished air, 'Why that is Socialism,' at which there was a loud laugh all round." [Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 18.]

from 1880 to 1883 . . . . The weary sessions went on, full of quarrels, thorny, and utterly barren."[1]

It was as this time that Auberon Herbert, once a Liberal M.P. and a Radical of the old School wrote his devastating book, A Politician in Trouble About his Soul. In it Herbert wrote a devastating comment of the fumbling and unguided course of the Liberal Party, caught as it was not only in the Irish and Imperial dilemmas, but in the basic struggles between laissez-faire and social reform. "The great function of a Liberal leader at the present moment," Herbert wrote, "is to lead us just as we are going, without making us aware, or even if possible without being aware himself of the true readings of the compass."[2] His hero says: "I am quite conscious that, as an insignificant member of the great Liberal Party, I have not rights of possession as regards my opinions and actions for more than five minutes in advance of the present moment."[3] Herbert's criticisms read very much like those of some Whigs, a startling revelation of the growing similarity of opinion between laissez-faire Radicals and Whigs. He attacked the "Caucus": "Slowly but surely as your organisation, like a huge and overgrown octopus, spreads its arms in every direction, the people will lose their habit of watchfulness and their

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1. McCarthy, op. cit., vol. 5, pp. 150-1.

2. Herbert, Auberon: A Politician in Trouble About his Soul, London, 1884, p. 21.

3. Ibid., p. 30.

power of free criticism."[1] He attacked the Social Radicals: "An old Radical, if he had not the largest mental horizon in the world, yet kept his ideas in an orderly condition; he knew what he was looking for, and asked plainly and straightly for it. But his feckless descendants of the present day go wandering about in the happy-go-lucky fashion of bone-and-ragmen who pick up anything that lies in their way and may possibly turn into a prize."[2] And he attacked Gladstone: "We all see the democratic changes in Mr. Gladstone, but then we cannot help seeing also that it is his interest to become more democratic. Why did he and many of our other leaders only become decidedly democratic in mind after the householders became voters?"[3]

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If the years from 1880 to 1884 were barren and fruitless, dividing the Liberals increasingly, the years 1885 and 1886 were years of stark tragedy for the Liberal Party. The year 1885 began with fiery radical speeches by Chamberlain [which will be considered later], bitterly emphasising Liberal disagreements. But the event which caused untold harm to the Government, more harm than any other single incident in its history, was the fall of Khartoum.

We have seen above that Gordon was sent to the Sudan "in

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1. Ibid., p. 79.

2. Ibid., p. 181.

3. Ibid., pp. 93-4.

a fit of absent-mindedness", and that the more Radical members of the Cabinet tried in vain to exorcise him and the whole Egyptian problem from their minds, while Hartington, Selborne, and other Whigs shared the popular fervour for rescuing the quixotic general. But the Wolseley expedition was despatched too late and acted too slowly; on the 28th of January, 1885, it reached Khartoum, to find that the town, the garrison, and Gordon had been massacred two days previously. The cry that went up all over Great Britain, but mainly in England, and again mainly in London, was fantastic in its vehemence. Gladstone and his Government were attacked, caricatured, and slandered in most of the newspapers of the land, the music-halls rang with applause for performances which ridiculed the Government, while in some less responsible quarters the initials of the "G.O.M." were reversed, and Gladstone was condemned as the "Murderer of Gordon".[1] Nothing in his career made Gladstone so unpopular, and never again was he to regain the popularity which he had known before Khartoum.

The popular fury was reflected in Parliament, and it was due only to great good fortune and equivocation that the Government managed to survive. The good fortune lay in the

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1. Thus one popular refrain ran:

"The M.O.G., when his life ebbs out,
Will ride in a fiery chariot,
And sit in state,
On a red-hot plate,
Between Pilate and Judas Iscariot."

[Magnus, op. cit., p. 322.]

fact that the Earl of Rosebery, whose popular following was considerable and whose worth in the eyes of imperialists was great, joined the Cabinet at this crucial time as Lord Privy Seal, though he was in far from entire accord with the actions which had led to Khartoum, and wrote to Goschen of "a sense of duty" in undertaking "a very trying position".[1] This step was thought by many commentators to have saved the Government from falling. The equivocation lay in the Government's attitude. Although no resignations from the Cabinet occurred over Khartoum, division was still deep; Harcourt was in favour of leaving the Sudan, while Whigs like Hartington supported the policy of "smash the Mahdi" as strongly as any Tory. In the Liberal Party in Parliament the divisions were even greater, both factions having strong and able spokesmen, particularly Goschen and Forster for the Whigs, John Morley for the Radical "scuttlers". The issue was faced, then, by looking the other way. Naturally the thought foremost in the minds of all was what the Government would do; rising to heights of obscurity notable even for him, Gladstone said: "What we say is that we are not prepared, at the present moment, to say that there is no obligation upon us to use, according to circumstances, efforts, if we go there, [i.e. to the Sudan] to leave behind us an orderly government."[2] A more able example of Parliamentary obfuscation is hard to find. But such tactics were

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1. Colton, Percy [ed]: Lord Goschen and His Friends - The Goschen Letters, London, 1946, p. 95.

2. Holland, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 21.

unquestionably necessary, divided as the Liberals were; as Holland points out: "Had it not been for Lord Hartington's reassurance to the men who thought and felt as he did, the Government would doubtless have been defeated. Probably the same result would have occurred had not the Radicals been satisfied by the speeches of the Prime Minister and Sir William Harcourt that retreat was only delayed for a short time."[1]

The censure vote took place on February 28, and defeat was averted by only 14 votes, 302-288. Gladstone, it is said, turned to his nearest neighbour on the Ministerial Front Bench and remarked cryptically "that will do". In any event, about half the Cabinet wished to resign at once, and the decision not to do so was made only after some hesitation. Shortly afterwards, John Morley brought in a resolution from the Radical benches which amounted to an expression of hope that noaggressive position would be taken up, that is, that the Mahdi would not be "smashed". Some countenance had been given to this point of view by Gladstone in referring to the Sudanese as "a people rightly struggling to be free", with a sympathy which had been conspicuously missing in regard to Egypt itself, but the Government and the official Opposition opposed the motion. Nevertheless, in spite of dividing against the two Front Benches, Morley summoned 112 votes

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1. Ibid., p. 26.

against 455, a striking display of Radical strength at a time when popular hysteria was at its height. Both Chamberlain and Dilke, however, voted with the rest of the Government against Morley's motion.

The Government had been shaken to its roots by this whole affair, and it was widely assumed that its days were numbered from that time on. The Annual Register for 1885 observed: "The Ministerial statements with regard to the Sudan, which fell so flat in Parliament, met with equally scant favour in the press."[1] Again, "The effects of these debates and divisions outside the walls of Parliament was to lower very considerably the prestige of the Ministry. The feebleness of their defence was not less remarked upon than the want of unity in their view both of the past and of the future."[2] With remarkable restraint The Economist said: "The abstention of so many Whigs, the desertion of a few others,[3] the opposition in debate, though not in the lobbies, of so many Radicals, and the half-concealed disapproval of many staunch supporters, were all, of course, mortifications to men who are conscious of great difficulties, and great, though suppressed, divergences of opinion."[4]

The Government was not allowed to have respite. In the

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1. [illegible] p. 27
2. [illegible] p. 44.
3. Including Forster and Goschen.
4. The Economist, vol. 43, March 7, 1885, p. 378.

Cabinet a bitter division occurred over whether to send an army to "smash the Mahdi", and dissensions over the issue almost resulted in complete disruption. But at this juncture a furtunate incident occurred. Gladstone had, more than a little against his will, announced the decision to send soldiers to the Sudan when, on March 30, a Russian Army defeated the Afghans at Penjdeh. Now the Prime Minister had his chance, and early in April he made an agressive speech in the House of Commons, warning the Russians away from further warlike adventures in Afghanistan. The gamble succeeded; the Russians drew back, arbitration ensued, and while the "Penjdeh incident" was not without its harmful effect to the Government, Gordon and Khartoum were forgotten for the time and the episode ended, the Sudan remaining in the hands of the Mahdi.

While "the end of General Gordon" laid the groundwork for the fall of the Government, a more immediate cause lay in the old malignant sore, Ireland. And indeed perhaps it is more just to say that the Government's fall was due chiefly to its inability in five years to solve the Irish problem. Khartoum was a tremendous blow at a crucial moment, but it was the Irish who were the Government's real bête noire.

At the end of November, 1884, the ill-fated O'Shea began again to correspond with Joseph Chamberlain. To O'Shea the Radical submitted a plan for Irish local government, with

County Councils to be co-ordinated and aided by a "Central Board" of administration. Purely Irish affairs were to be dealt with, property qualifications were to be observed, and Irish representation in the British Parliament was to continue. In light of future developments it is important to bear in mind that Chamberlain's scheme was a type of local government, of the sort which, he said, he wished later to extend to England, Scotland, and Wales. Imperial hegemony was to be left quite undisturbed, and the scheme was not to be confused with the Nationalist conception of Home Rule. As we shall see, Chamberlain had never been willing to concede complete Home Rule, of the sort which Irishmen demanded. O'Shea acted as intermediary between Chamberlain and Parnell, and conveyed to the former the definite assurance that Parnell would support the Chamberlain scheme <u>in place of Home Rule</u>.

Nothing, in fact, could have been further from the truth. While Parnell, unlike some of his more violent supporters, did not fear a measure of local government as tending to undermine the case for Home Rule, <u>he was entirely unwilling to accept it as a substitute</u>. This fact Chamberlain, misled by the machinations of O'Shea, did not understand at all. On January 21, 1885, Parnell said at Cork: "We cannot under the British Constitution ask for more than the restitution of Grattan's Parliament. But no man has the right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation."[1] Eight days earlier he had written

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1. Garvin, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 1, p. 590.

to O'Shea: "The two questions of the reform of Local Government and the restitution of an Irish Parliament,must, as I explained to you from the first, be kept absolutely separate."[1] Garvin comments: "Nothing could be plainer. Parnell, like Chamberlain, meant just what he said. But neither of them in the least understood the other."[2]

Thus fortified by what he conceived to be the Irish leader's approval, Chamberlain brought his Local Governemnt scheme before the Cabinet in the spring. But the Cabinet was not as willing to consider the question in a favourable light as it might have been at an earlier stage. The disgust and horror which Englishmen felt for the Parnellites, added to the lull in Irish "outrages" which the stern hand of Lord Spencer and the quiescence of Parnell in 1883 and 1884 had brought about, combined to make many Liberals apathetic or hostile to further Irish reform. Nevertheless, the Chamberlain scheme was brought before the Cabinet, and on Saturday, May 9, the whole question was considered at a long meeting. The issue was complicated by two others: land purchase and "coercion", as the Crimes Act of 1882 was to expire in the autumn. Gardiner sums up the complicated situation as concisely as possible: "The Whigs would not have the Central

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 589.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 590.

Board; the Radicals who wanted the Central Board would not have the Land Purchase Bill and would only consent on terms to a very attenuated Crimes Act; Gladstone, who disliked the Crimes Act, was anxious to have both the Central Board and Land Purchase; Spencer and Harcourt were primarily concerned about the Crimes Act, but were, in differing measure, ready to support the Central Board and Land Purchase."[1] Finally, the Cabinet refused to sanction the proposal for Local Government; according to Morley all the Commoners except Hartington supported it, while all the Peers except Granville opposed it. Whether this contention is exactly accurate or not is immaterial; in any event Dublin Castle looked sceptically on the plan and the Cabinet did say no. Gladstone's remark, made to Chamberlain as they left the Cabinet room, is famous: "Within six years, if it please God to spare their lives, they will be repenting in sackcloth and ashes."[2] Within one year Chamberlain and Gladstone would be bitter political enemies, partly due to the cavalier rejection by the Whigs of the Central Board scheme.

The issue, complicated enough at this point, soon became even more so. A few days later Gladstone introduced a Land Purchase Bill in the House of Commons. Feeling themselves "vilely tricked", for they had explicitly told the Prime

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1. Gardiner, A. G.: Life of Harcourt, vol. 1, London, 1923, p. 523.

2. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 194.

Minister "no Land Purchase without the Central Board", Chamberlain and Dilke immediately sent in their resignations, and Shaw-Lefevre, the Postmaster General, hastened to follow. They were persuaded, however, to suspend [not withdraw] the resignations, but now Lord Spencer threatened to resign if Land Purchase and a Crimes Act were not passed. Gladstone himself was a deadly enemy of "coercion", and in a letter to Lord Spencer on May 10-11 had said: "My fixed convictions make it simply impossible for me to be responsible for a fresh Crimes Act, such as you at present desire without the Central Board Scheme."[1] Thus on May 15-16 Chamberlain, Dilke, and Shaw-Lefevre were on the verge of resigning on one side, Spencer on the other. Small wonder that Gladstone wrote to his wife on May 1 that the history of his Cabinet had been "a wild romance of politics, with a continual succession of hairbreadth escapes and strange accidents pressing upon one another."![2] Had the letter been written a fortnight later the unhappy premier might have been less exotic and more pessimistic.

Into the unsettled situation came a new development. H. C. E. Childers, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had brought before the Cabinet a budget, proposing increased taxes on beer and spirits, a rise in income tax from 5d. to 8d., equalising of the death duties, and taxation of corporation

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1. Hammond, op. cit., p. 371n.
2. Hammond and Foot, op. cit., p. 166.

property. Though the last two proposals pleased the Radicals the tax on beer was much disliked, and during the latter half of May a running battle over several budgetary provisions was carried on. Childers, feeling isolated, wished to resign; now the harrassed premier had an entirely new problem in addition to Ireland. One example of the prima donna attitude which affected the Cabinet may be given: Dilke wrote in his diary of the budget arguments: "I opposed on June 5 the proposed increase of the wine duties from 1s. to 1s. 3d., and from 2s. 6d. to 3s. I carried with me at first all but Mr. Gladstone against Childers, and at last Mr. Gladstone also. Childers then left the room; Mr. Gladstone, Lord Granville, Harcourt, and the Chancellor, one by one went after him, but he would not come back."[1]

By June 7 the differences were resolved, and the budget vote took place on June 8. By 264 votes to 252 it was defeated, thirty-nine Parnellites voting with the Conservatives, seventy-six Liberals abstaining, and six voting against the Government. Gladstone at once resigned, and after some constitutional discussions, Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister of a Conservative Government.

There was universal relief at the fall of the Government. The Annual Register of 1885 said: "No Liberal journal seemed grieved by the resignation, which some of them admitted to be

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1. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 143.

inevitable."[1] It was common knowledge that most Liberals had desired the Government's fall; of the Whigs Morley wrote: "What had happened on this occasion was the silent withdrawal, under the pressure of powerful trades, from the Government ranks of many Liberals . . ."[2] On the other side, Acton wrote to Mary Gladstone on June 16, 1885: ". . . The defeat was prepared by the Birmingham wire-pullers to evade the impending collision between the two wings of the Government; and they induced their people to stay away and bring the Tories in for a time. If you do not know or believe this, let me say that I have it on the best Birmingham authority . . ."[3] It is certainly clear that the defeat was welcomed by most Liberals as a release from Irish and other problems, and by the Radicals specially as an opportunity, free from the trammels of office which surrounded their leaders, Chamberlain and Dilke, to launch an onslaught upon the Whigs. Forty-three years later Herbert Gladstone wrote: "The end came . . . because the tension between the Whigs and Radicals had reached a point where breakage was desired by both sections."[4] Morley pointed out: The suspicious hinted that ministers, or some of them, unobtrusively contrived at their own fall.

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1. [illegible], p. 105.

2. Morley, vol. 3, p. 202.

3. Hammond, op. cit., pp. 373-4n.

4. Gladstone, Herbert /Lord/: After Thirty Years, London, 1928, p. 197.

Their supporters, it was afterwards remarked, received none of those imperative adjurations to return after dinner that are usual on solemn occasions; else there could never have been seventy-six absentees."[1]

So ended the tortured Cabinet of Irreconcilables; so ended as well a whole era of politics which had begun in 1832; so began a new era of imperialism, democracy and social reform, which was to continue until 1914. Rarely if ever can there have been a Cabinet so destroyed by jealousy, rivalry, and incompatibility; three Cabinet Ministers had resigned [Argyll, Forster, and Bright], and of threatened resignations - to take the more important Ministers only - there were one or more by Chamberlain, Northbrook, Hartington, Childers, Dilke, Selborne, and Harcourt. Only Granville among the leading Ministers had not threatened to resign, and he was regarded by common consensus as both weak and under the sway of the Prime Minister. In the House and in the country Liberals had been even more divided, and Radical M.P.'s had on a variety of occasions shown their independence of both the Whigs and the Government. The Whigs as well had consistently acted as a faction. At the time of the defeat the party was almost destroyed by division, and Morley states categorically that if Lord Salisbury had not formed a Government "it would almost certainly have led to the

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1. Morley, _op. cit._, vol. 3, p. 202.

disruption of the Liberal Cabinet and Party."[1]

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Before continuing our narrative it will perhaps be wise to discuss the character and actions of several of the most important men who played so decisive a role at this juncture. The first of these is, of course, Mr. Gladstone.

(1) The role of the Prime Minister had been arduous indeed since 1880; his task had been one which would have driven to loss of health or resignation many younger men who might not have had his splendid physique or mental equanimity. Quite apart from strenuous or tragic political events like the Land Act of 1881, the murders in Phoenix Park, the Reform Act of 1884 and Khartoum, Gladstone's job as party leader and political mediator was a fearfully difficult one, one which immensely complicated the already entangled political issues which faced him, issues which a united Liberal Party could have done much to solve. The Grand Old Man was, however, the ideal man for the task. Not only had he been in politics since 1832, not only had he had unrivalled experience and great triumphs, but with respect to social reform, the most important problem of the day, he stood in the centre of his party. For Gladstone, it should be reminded, was above all things pragmatic and practical, a statesman and administrator,

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1. Ibid., p. 207.

not a theorist. While he adhered fairly strictly to many of the shibboleths of his day, such as the economic "laws" of supply and demand, he was nevertheless not always loath to countenance some tinkering with the economic machine by the hand of man. The Irish Land Act of 1881 had been evidence of this fact. Above all he believed in liberty for each individual; basically he was more in sympathy with the Radicalism of the old Manchester School, now perilously close to Whiggism, than with the new Social Radicalism. We have noted these characteristics in our first chapter; we have also seen that Mr. Gladstone possessed a sense of coming trends and was not unwilling to face them as were the Whigs. Perhaps it was true, as Holland states: "Gladstone's mind was not rock-like, but of the liquid order. It was highly sensitive to outside forces and influences; like a river it was in perpetual change and motion."[1] Nevertheless, this meant that the Prime Minister could move with the times, and in politics there are few worse qualities than to possess a "rock-like" mind.

Mr. Gladstone balanced uneasily between Radical and Whig, in many cases preferring Radical policies, as over Ireland and Reform, but vastly preferring Whig methods and Whig society. His son wrote of his position: "Through the five years Mr.

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 284.

Gladstone was the persevering, perplexed, and sometimes the exasperated referee in the Cabinet, and the spokesman of both sections in the House of Commons."[1] He was "the last barrier between the Whigs and the oncoming flood of Radicalism under Mr. Chamberlain."[2] In a letter written after his resignation in 1881 to George Goschen, the Duke of Argyll complained of "the letting go of all that has hitherto been understood as sound Liberal Principles." Then, heavily underlined: "_Gladstone exercises such a sway over the constituencies that the members are afraid to call their souls their own._"[3] Many times in the five years the Prime Minister averted crises by his own action, and twice, in late 1882 and late 1884 he was persuaded to remain as premier in order not to destroy the party. Asquith writes that it was at the end of 1882, with Sir Charles Dilke's entrance into the Cabinet, "that the growing fissure between the two sections of the Cabinet dates its effective origin."[4] The _Economist_ wrote on January 13, 1883, of "the superficial unity which Mr. Gladstone's influence preserves in his party . . . "[5] Similarly, on November 11, 1882, Lord Hartington wrote an appealing letter to the Prime Minister: "The advanced section

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1. Gladstone, _op. cit._, p. 197.

2. _Ibid._, p. 277.

3. Colson, Percy [ed.]: _Lord Goschen and His Friends - The Goschen Letters_, London, 1946, p. 83.

4. Asquith, H. H.: _Fifty Years of Parliament_, vol. 1, London, 1926, p. 91.

5. _Economist_, Volume 41, p. 34.

which forms the strength . . . of the party would require stronger measures from any successor than it would from you - measures in which I should certainly not be prepared to lead them. And if any other leader whould attempt the task, I do not think that the tie - already strained - which unites the moderate section with the party would hold for a momemt . . . . I cannot doubt in my own mind that your retirement would lead to the speedy, if not the immediate dissolution of the Government and of the present Liberal majority."[1] On December 11, 1882, Chamberlain wrote to Harcourt of Mr. Gladstone's resignation: "It must come some day, but the later the better."[2] Early in 1885 Chamberlain's Radical speeches alarmed many of his colleagues, and again it was Mr. Gladstone who was forced to come to the rescue to patch up differences, though Chamberlain's programme held little more appeal for him than for the Whigs. On February 11, 1885, he wrote to Lord Acton: "'Tory Democracy', the favourite idea on that side, is no more like the Conservative Party in which I was bred than it is like Liberalism . . . . The Liberalism of today is better . . . yet far from good. Its pet idea is what they call construction - that is to say, taking into the hands of the state the business of the individual man. Both the one and the other have much to estrange me, and have had for many, many years."[3]

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 378.
2. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 464.
3. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 173.

In later years a myth arose that the Grand Old Man was a dictator, who let no opposition deter him. In actual fact, the truth is much closer to the reverse. Had he shown more leadership and guidance in his own Cabinet, many of the divisions might have been avoided. Hamilton Fyfe asserts of the Liberal Party: "Worst of all, it was leaderless, an army that lacked generals, that knew not which way to go . . . [Mr. Gladstone] had a team of Cabinet Ministers which any Prime Minister would have found hard to drive; he made no attempt to drive them."[1]

Another continual source of worry and irritation to the Prime Minister had been the behaviour of the Queen, who had remained cast in the Disraelian die and whose attitude towards him in this Ministry had been that of a hide-bound Tory. She objected to his speeches, she objected to his colleagues, she objected to his legislation, she objected to his leaving the country without her consent. After the Phoenix Park murders she wrote that "this horrible event [is] the direct result of what she has always considered and stated to Mr. Gladstone and to Lord Spencer as a most fatal and hazardous step."[2]

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1. Fyfe, Hamilton: The British Liberal Party, London, 1928, p. 88, p. 90. In 1885 the Duke of Argyll wrote to Gladstone: "The outside world, knowing your great gifts and powers, assume that you are dictator in your own Cabinet . . . But your amiability to colleagues, your even extreme gentleness towards them . . . has enabled men playing their own game . . . to take out of your hands the formation of opinion." [Morley, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 4.] After the Government's fall Granville commented to Gladstone: "I think you too often counted noses in your last Cabinet." [Ibid., p. 5]

2. Hardie, Frank: The Political Influence of Queen Victoria, London, 1935, p. 77

Writing to another correspondent of the same event, Queen Victoria condemned Mr. Gladstone, "backed as he will be by his evil genius, Mr. Chamberlain, and this dreadfully Radical Government which contains many thinly-veiled Republicans."[1] After Khartoum she sent the Prime Minister an unciphered telegram, apparently intending it to be read by others: "These news from Khartoum are frightful and to think that all this might have been prevented and many precious lives saved by earlier action is too fearful."[2] This step was followed by an attempted intrigue with Lady Wolseley to persuade her husband to mutiny against Gladstone's instructions. It is not surprising that during this Government the premier once burst out to Lord Rosebery: "'The Queen alone is enough to kill a man;' and when Rosebery laughed, he continued: 'This is no laughing matter, though it may sound so:' and he enumerated half a dozen instances in which the Queen had added to his difficulties."[3]

In mid-1885, then, Mr. Gladstone was an old [75] man, struggling with factions on several sides and the implacable hostility of the Queen. On July 4, 1885, the Economist wrote: "He sees a prospect of divisions among the Liberals, and he prevents them by taking the helm in his own hands. . . 'Men

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1. Guedalla, Philip [ed.]: The Queen and Mr. Gladstone, vol. 2, London, 1933, p. 40.

2. Ibid., p. 58.

3. Eyck, Erich: Gladstone, London, 1938, p. 375.

of the most widely different opinions will walk,' as Lord Rosebery put it, 'under Mr. Gladstone's umbrella.'"[1]

(2) Lord Hartington and the Whigs. Lord Hartington was the leading representative of an old school, the Whig aristocracy which was accustomed to governing the nation, and to moving very slowly, then only when pushed. It was noted, this aristocracy, for dignity rather than intellect. As we have seen, Lord Hartington was unhappy to an extreme in the 1880-5 Government and wanted on several occasions to resign, only refraining from doing so due to his desire not to leave the Whigs leaderless. It did them little good when, like Goschen in attacking Chamberlain, they claimed to be the heirs of an older Radicalism: "I want to plead the cause of freedom against State interference, and that is one of the old Radical doctrines . . . It is an old Radical doctrine, try freedom first."[2] In summer, 1885, Edward Dicey, once a Liberal and now already advocating a "Union" of Whigs and Tories, wrote: "The plain truth is that if you once desert the solid ground of individual freedom you can find no resting-place till you reach the abyss of Socialism."[3] In the public eye as in fact, the Whigs were far closer to the Tories than to the Radicals;

1. The Economist, vol. 43, p. 806.

2. On January 31, 1885. Annual Register, 1885, p. 15.

3. Fortnightly Review, vol. 38, p. 467.

as Lord Salisbury said, in June, 1883: "My impression is that a Whig is a person who denounces in private the measures which in public he supports."[1] Salisbury emphasised the coalition which formed the Liberal Party by saying at a speech in Birmingham on March 28, 1883: "We may safely say that the mechanism of our political system is this, that when it is going to be fine weather Lord Hartington appears, and when Mr. Joseph Chamberlain appears you may look out for squalls."[2] Salisbury's niece writes that by 1885 very little separated Hartington from him except tradition: "In standards of conduct and singleness of aim, sympathy between the two leaders was complete; in political opinion there was little, if any, difference discoverable between them; but the peculiar characteristics which had for so long given life to the artificial unity of the Liberal Party, still survived . . . . To keep their group a separate entity . . . above all, to preserve their right to the sacred name of Liberal, with all the emotions and traditions which it embodied, was still a dominant anxiety with the Whig leaders."[3]

If the Whigs were still separate from the Conservative

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1. Annual Register, 1883, p. 142.

2. Ibid., p. 73.

3. Cecil, [Lady] Gwendolyn: Life of Salisbury, vol. 3, London, 1931, p. 299.

Party, they were even further removed from the Radicals. During the early '80's several of them, such as Lord Brabourne, Lord Dunraven and Edward Dicey called for a unified party of moderate Conservatives and Liberals to be formed. Goschen, a sympathetic listener, wrote in April, 1885: "I do not know whether [the Social Radicals] will think it a compliment or the reverse when I say that at the cradle of some of them have stood the sirens of State Socialism."[1] Expressing, as a Whig, his view of Whig principles, Earl Cowper [who had resigned as Irish Viceroy with Forster in 1882] wrote in May, 1883: "Patience! We are better than we were. Do what lies before you. Don't try too much at a time. Take up some more obvious evil to which you see a remedy, and help to apply that remedy. Not much can be done in a single generation, and if you try to go too fast you will do more harm than good . . . . There are many who think that we are drifting very rapidly towards democracy. Now I am not much in favour of democracy, and I particularly dislike the feeling that we are doing anything very rapidly . . . ."[2] How very different, how out of place in the same political party was this attitude from the retort of a young Radical, G. W. E. Russell, who wrote: "Modern Whiggery distrusts the people . . . . I believe in

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1. In the <u>Nineteenth Century</u>, vol. 17, p. 727.

2. <u>Ibid.</u>, vol. 13, p. 732, p. 736.

democracy. I accept it. I will faithfully serve and defend it."[1]

At the crux of the controversy between Whig and Radical lay a vast difference in social attitude and outlook. This was so important a difference and caused so much strife that it will be valuable to quote at length from a significant article in the "Fortnightly Review of June, 1883, written by "A Liberal". "Unfortunately," the article said, "the social gulf which separates the new Liberals and the old Whigs is infinitely wider than that which divides either Whigs or Liberals from Conservatives . . . . Men who have succeeded in trade or business, who can command all the pleasures, pomps, and luxuries of life, and who have achieved a certain position for themselves, are beginning, not unintelligibly, to resent the treatment they receive at the hands of the Liberal managers. To act as warming-pan in the representation of boroughs or counties for the scions of Whig families, to play the part of second candidate in a hotly-contested election, and to bear the pecuniary brunt of the struggle, in order that a young gentleman, through whose veins may course the purest Norman blood, may be borne to victory, is a noble aim, but does not satisfy, after a certain period, the cravings of those who wish to feel that they are a power in the State."[2] The

1. Ibid., vol. 13, p. 926.

2. Fortnightly Review, vol. 32, pp. 771-2.

Tories, the writer goes on to say, are alive to the need for money in politics, the Whigs are not. "The Whig managers must remember that in the present day territorial wealth has diminished . . . . The Conservatives are thoroughly alive to this fact, and to the responsibilities which it imposes upon them. To use an expressive colloquialism, "They go for money'. When Mr. W. H. Smith was rejected at the Reform Club he was received with open arms by the Carlton, and he is only one of many instances that might be mentioned."[1] No such social snobbery affects the Tory leaders as with the Whigs: "Equality is the law of Conservatism in its social aspects: inequality that of Liberalism."[2] It is difficult to rate the importance of this argument too highly.

Hartington in a speech at Accrington on December 2, 1883, revealingly described his view of Whiggery: "I admit that the Whigs are not the leaders in popular movements, but the Whigs have been able, as I think, to the great advantage of the country, to direct, and guide, and moderate those popular movements. They have formed a connecting link between the advanced party and those classes which, possessing property, power, and influence, are naturally averse to change . . . That is the part which the Whigs have played in the past, and which I believe the Whigs or those who represent them now, may be

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1. Ibid., p. 772.

2. Ibid., p. 773.

called upon to play with equal advantage in the future."[1]

Some idea of the reaction of Social Radicals to this kind of attitude is revealed in Sir Charles Dilke's diary at this time, when Chamberlain sent him "passages from a speech which ought to be delivered: 'Yes, gentlemen, I entirely agree with Lord Hartington. It is the business and duty of Radicals to lead great popular movements, and if they are fortunate enough to kindle the fire of national enthusiasm and to stir the hearts of the people, then it will be the prerogative of the great Whig noble who has been waiting round the corner to direct and guide and moderate the movement which he has done all in his power to prevent and discourage.'"[2]

(3) Chamberlain and the Social Radicals. In discussing Radicalism, then, let us begin with the proposition that the Social Radicals hated the Whigs, for several reasons, more even than they hated the Conservatives. In March, 1881, W. H. Mallock wrote in the Nineteenth Century: "English Radicalism is really a protest against aristocracy; it is not a protest in favour of equality. But what I am telling you is that while in your own hearts you [i.e., the Social Radicals] feel it to be the former, in your general language and in your professions to the people you proclaim it to be the latter. Hence it is that your party is weak. It is not fighting under its true colours . . . . Some day, should the political strife

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 405-6.

2. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 3.

ever grow keen enough, the mask it now wears will be stripped from it. Then it will be seen that this party, which is at present thought by some to utter the real voice of the people, is nothing but a class protest, in the narrowest sense of the word."[1]

In one sense, this comment is both acute and highly accurate. But it needs to be qualified sharply. The new force of Social Radicalism, as we have chosen to call it, was not *merely* a businessman's protest against a selfish aristocracy. Forster, Bright, Richard Cross, Goschen, W. H. Smith, were all businessmen, but they did not share Chamberlain's attitudes. Nor were the Social Radicals all businessmen; viz. Morley and Dilke. There may have been something very like a middle-class business protest in Chamberlain's land campaign, but it is impossible not to see the element of real social idealism in Chamberlain and his allies, no matter what one may think of the Radical leader as a person or of his later career. His land programme came also from a modified version of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*: "Chamberlain read it, electrified; the effect on Morley was the same."[2] Let us examine some of his speeches.

The year 1883 was the first, Garvin says, of Chamberlain's "platform years". In a speech on March 30, 1883, at Birmingham, he declared: "Lord Salisbury constitutes himself the

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1. *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 9, p. 434.

2. Garvin, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 385.

spokesman of a class - of the class to which he himself belongs, who toil not, neither do they spin, whose fortunes . . . have . . . grown and increased, while they have slept, by levying an increased share on all that other men have done by toil and labour to add to the general wealth and prosperity of the nation."[1] At Bristol, November 26, 1883: "Government by the people means government for the people. Great social questions, which are every day becoming more important, can only be satisfactorily settled when the whole of the people take a part in the work of legislation."[2] At Birmingham, January 6, 1885: "I have sometimes found it difficult, as one of the Radical members in a Liberal Government, to reconcile the loyalty which I owe to my colleagues and to the party at large with the strenuous and constant promotion of the principles which I am supposed especially to represent.[3] . . . If you will go back to early history . . . you will find that . . . every man was born into the world with natural rights . . . . Private ownership has taken the place of these communal rights, and this system has become so interwoven with our habits and usages, it has been so sanctioned by law and protected by custom, that it might be very difficult and perhaps impossible to reverse it. But then I ask, what ransom will property pay for the security it enjoys? . . . .

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1. Ibid., p. 392.

2. Boyd, C. W.: Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches, vol. 1, London, 1914, p. 114.

3. Ibid., p. 131.

I think in the future we shall hear a great deal more about the obligations of property, and we shall not hear quite so much about its rights."[1] At Ipswich, January 14, 1885: "The birthright of the English people has been bartered away for a mess of pottage, and it has become the possession of private owners of property . . . . The idler, the drunkard, the criminal and the fool must bear the brunt of their own defects. The strong man and the able man will always be first in the race. But what I say is that the community as a whole, co-operating for the benefit of all, may do something to make the life of all its citizens, and above all the poorest of them, somewhat better, somewhat nobler, somewhat happier . . . . We are told that this country is the paradise of the rich; it should be our task to see that it does not become the purgatory of the poor."[2] Again at Birmingham, on January 29, 1885: "I hold that the sanctity of public property is greater even than that of private property . . . . Because State Socialism may cover very injurious and very unwise theories, that is no reason at all why we should refuse to recognise the fact that Government is only the organisation of the whole people for the benefit of all its members, and that the community may - aye, and ought to - provide for all its members benefits which it is impossible for individuals to provide by their

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 549.

2. Boyd [ed.], op. cit., vol. 1, p. 142, p. 150.

solitary and separate efforts."[1]

The effect of these speeches was tremendous, even unprecedented, as the speeches themselves had been. As we have seen, Lord Hartington came close to resigning from the Cabinet at the end of 1883 after Chamberlain had launched his onslaughts in favour of parliamentary reform. For his speeches in January, 1885, he had been censured by Mr. Gladstone, and thought he might be expelled from the Cabinet. For his part, the Prime Minister was highly uneasy and on January 22 wrote to Granville: "I . . . I admit that from various symptoms it is not improbable there may be a plan or intention to break up the party."[2] But daily Chamberlain's popularity increased, daily his name as a popular leader became even more prominent.

In the Fortnightly Review between the summers of 1883 and 1884 there appeared six unsigned articles outlining various aspects of "The Radical Programme". A seventh article appeared in July, 1885, and there were additional, signed, contributions by Chamberlain and Jesse Collings. The unsigned ones were written by various associates of Chamberlain's including Morley and Collings, and were supervised by Chamberlain himself; they advocated a variety of Social-Radical measures, including manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, payment of members, Disestablishment of State Churches, a great scheme of public housing, measures for local government

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1. Ibid., p. 155, p. 164.

2. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 171.

and land allotments for rural labourers, free schools, and progressive taxes on landed property and income in place of the regressive food taxes which still garnered an annual £4 million. "A direct tax on income and property is the lever to which we shall have to look for the social reforms of the future."[1] The drastic quality of this programme, which owed much to Henry George, and which was reprinted in the summer of 1885 in a red volume with an introduction by Chamberlain, was unprecedented. Never before had there been so clarion and so unmistakable a call to the ordinary people of Great Britain, or one which was so dreaded and condemned by the propertied classes. When the summer of 1885 came the Whigs and Tories were frankly afraid, afraid of Chamberlain's "Caucus", his constant leakages to the press and his aggressive manner almost as much as his programme itself. Two million new electors had been added to the rolls, and now there was in Chamberlain a leader of tremendous popularity and vitality to guide the social movement, aided by an ally of great sagacity and ability in Sir Charles Dilke. Whigs and Whiggish journals could condemn the Social Radicals, but the latter felt that they were the coming force, soon to triumph, and faced the election of 1885 with the confident hope that within a very few years they would be ruling the country.

Before leaving Chamberlain, it is vital to examine his opinions on the Irish problem. As we have seen, he was at

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1. _Fortnightly Review_, vol. 38, p. 129.

all times sympathetic to the Irish cause, and even more than Gladstone was commonly regarded as friendly to the Home Rulers. But in reality he was never a convinced Home Ruler; his innate Imperialism first asserting itself over Ireland, Chamberlain refused to countenance a scheme of Home Rule which would end the Act of Union of 1800 and destroy the imperial hegemony. In a memorable speech on October 25, 1881, he had asked: "Are we ready to consider the Union itself as a standing grievance? And are we prepared to admit that the question of separation is an open one between us? Well, I say for myself that I am not prepared to admit that this is possible, either in the interest of this country or in the interest of Ireland - that there should be created a hostile power within striking distance of these shores."[1] In a letter to a friend written late in 1884 and circulated among many of the Irish leaders, Chamberlain had written: "If Nationalism means separation, I for one am prepared to resist it . . . . Sooner than yield on this point I would govern Ireland by force."[2] A federal scheme like the American union, with a certain amount of local autonomy subject to national supremacy, was as far as the Radical leader was willing to go; tragic irony lay in the certainty that only Home Rule could have ultimately avoided a hostile separation of the two islands.

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1. Boyd, [ed.], op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 238-9.

2. Garvin, vol. 1, p. 579.

While Chamberlain's conduct in the Home Rule crisis may appear something short of statesmanlike however, we must bear in mind that he had never supported Home Rule on the 1886 scale and acted in entire consistency with his previous record.

(4) Parnell. We have seen that the Irish leader was unusually quiescent in 1883 and 1884, also that thirty-nine Irishmen had voted with the Conservatives to bring down the Gladstone Government in June, 1885. In early 1885 Parnell came to the conclusion that the Liberal Party no longer afforded him his best vessel for action and that he would do well to look for Conservative support. There were good reasons for this decision. In the first place, he had grown weary of Liberal schisms and vacillations, resulting in no real policy being carried out. The rejection by the Cabinet of the County Council and Central Board Scheme had been a case in point. According to Hammond, Chamberlain's constant liaison with Captain O'Shea had also influenced Parnell's decision, for the Irish leader detested his mistress's husband. Moreover, the Irish Nationalists were unquestionably going to be returned to Parliament in far greater numbers in the 1885 election than ever before, thanks to the newly-passed Reform Act. If the Conservatives were strengthened somewhat by Irish support in the election might not the Parnellites hold the balance of power? Finally, Lord Randolph Churchill had made unofficial contacts with Parnell; according to the Irish leader's biographer: "Parnell liked few men; above all, he

liked few Englishmen. Yet he regarded Lord Randolph Churchill with no unfriendly feelings."[1] Was there not a chance to work with Churchill and with Lord Carnarvon, a known Home Ruler of a moderate type whom Salisbury had made Irish Viceroy? The Conservatives had agreed not to renew the Crimes Act; thus the prospect of a fruitful political liaison was inviting.

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We return now to politics in the summer of 1885. The politics of the next year were unquestionably the most important of any year in modern British history. They determined the course of parties, men, and measures from that day to this. The complexity of the situation was also novel to the British Isles; each day events seemed to take a new turn. To simplify them we must remember that there were two great issues in this period; the first was the social question; the second was Ireland. Let us consider them in that order.

In the late summer of 1885 the electoral campaign opened in earnest, with four British parties, or at least factions, struggling for supremacy. First there were the Conservatives, emphasising the Liberal divisions and the inadequacy of the Liberal Government's record over a period of five years. The Fair Trade movement was now at its height, thanks to the renewed incidence of the Great Depression; the Tories aroused imperialist sentiment by denouncing the "shame" of Majuba and Khartoum, as well as other foreign reverses and snubs at the

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1. O'Brien, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 44.

hands of the French, Russians, and Germans. Secondly, there were the Whigs, probably the most conservative of all, trying to maintain that all was already for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Third was the Gladstonian faction, moderating between the hostile elements of the Liberal coalition, and appealing as did Lord Rosebery to the "umbrella". "There must always be some who go faster and some who go slower," said Rosebery in the same speech at the end of June, "but who are all in their hearts animated by an equal desire to better the condition of the nation. There must always be different shades of opinion in the Liberal Party."[1] Finally, there were the Social Radicals under Chamberlain's leadership, concentrating hardest on the attack upon the Whigs, making an only slightly concealed attempt to drive them from the party. The Radicals suffered a grievous loss when in late July Sir Charles Dilke was removed from active politics by his implication in a divorce case which, while it did not prevent his being returned to Parliament in 1885, made him a much less important figure to conjure with, and one who was forced to withdraw altogether from political life for some time after the election of 1886. Hugh Price Hughes, the Methodist preacher, led a group of Radical Nonconformists who agitated for Dilke's retirement, and in a party sustained so largely by Nonconformist support this agitition was not without

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1. Annual Register, 1885, p. 135.

influence. Gladstone, not feeling able to include in his Cabinet a man under such a charge, left him out of the 1886 Liberal Government. Dilke had always been more friendly with and understood by Mr. Gladstone than had Chamberlain; basically more Radical than the Birmingham leader, Dilke possessed more tact, wisdom, and manner, and not only Chamberlain but Gladstone himself had thought him likely to be the next Liberal Prime Minister. Moreover, Dilke was tremendously popular in London; McCarthy says that he "had put himself at the head of the Radical democracy of the metropolis, and he was looked up to with confidence and admiration by the working-men of Great Britain."[1] Never again was the working-class population of London to be so friendly to the Liberals as when Dilke had stood at their head.

It was, consequently, Chamberlain who led the Radical drive for the "unauthorised programme" [first so termed by Goschen] in the election of 1885. His biographer has summed up the programme in seven points: (1) abolition of school fees and opposition to Church Schools; (2) local government in the counties; (3) Home-Rule-All-Round in the four nations of the British Isles, but leaving the Imperial Parliament supreme; (4) financial reforms, including graduated taxation; (5) land reform by local authorities; (6) Disestablishment of State Churches; (7) manhood suffrage, payment of members, more working-men M.P.'s. The "unauthorised programme", then, was a consolidation and a condensation of the "Radical

1. McCarthy, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 11.

Programme". The most important points in this platform were (1), (2), (4), and (5). Disestablishment was found to be a far from popular talking point with the electorate, and although the Guardian said on September 13 that 374 Liberal candidates favoured English, Welsh, or Scottish Disestablishment, cries of "the church in danger" helped the Tories considerably. Free schools seemed something less than overwhelmingly popular, but the rural land programme, dubbed "three acres and a cow" by a scoffing Tory, had an immense success. Local authorities, Chamberlain declared, should buy up land and parcel it out to agricultural labourers, that some semblance of the old yeoman class might be restored to the countryside. This anti-aristocratic principle was not entirely appreciated by Whigs and Conservatives, but was hailed with delight by rural labourers, now newly enfranchised.

Chamberlain's speeches in August and September set a new precedent in politics; Radicals like Labouchere looked jubilantly to him as Gladstone's successor and said that he was even more popular than the Grand Old Man himself. Moreover, never had a campaign like this one been known before; Social Radicalism had gathered up all the scattered Radical proposals of the past ten or fifteen years, and turned them into a coherent fighting programme. Harcourt, for one, hastened to identify himself with the "unauthorised programme". While declaring himself in favour of individual exertion and initiative ["I am opposed to confiscation in every shape or

form"[1], Chamberlain also declared that the trammels of party did not and would not bind him, then proceeded to attack the Whigs with vigour. On the 29th of August Hartington spoke at Waterfoot, a speech which had been eagerly awaited as the Whig answer to Social Radicalism. Discussing the land problem, Hartington declared: "I will frankly admit to you that I do not believe in the efficacy or advantage of any of those proposals for arbitrarily or forcibly redistributing the land of this country . . . . It may not be at present the popular thing to say anything in defence of the rights of property; but I am of opinion that it is a most grave and serious matter to do anything which may rashly, and in an unsound manner, affect those rights. Whatever principles may be applied to land are likely, sooner or later, to be applied to other descriptions of property; and I firmly believe that the best hope for the welfare of this country, and for the improvement of the condition of the population of this country, lies in the inducement which we can give to the accumulation and probable employment of capital, not in the direction of discouraging the accumulation of capital or discouraging the motives which induce its owners, probably, to employ it; and I firmly believe that the first to suffer from any rash encroachment upon, or unsound interference with, the rights of property, would be the labouring classes

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1. At Hull, August 5, 1885. Boyd, vol. 1, p. 169.

themselves . . ."[1] The speech was a considered attack upon the basic premises of Social Radicalism.

Chamberlain replied heatedly at Warrington on September 8: "There is not a single Liberal candidate who has not accepted some one or more points of the Radical Programme. It is therefore perfectly futile for any political Rip Van Winkle to come down from the mountain on which he is slumbering, and to tell us that these things are to be excluded from the Liberal programme."[2] He went on to attack "the convenient cant of selfish wealth", and "the eternal laws of supply and demand". Chamberlain declared, in a phrase which might have come straight from Henry George: "The great problem of our civilisation is unsolved. We have to account for, and grapple with the mass of misery and destitution in our midst, contrasted as it is with the evidences of abundant wealth and teeming prosperity."[3] Then: "I shall be told tomorrow this is Socialism. I have learned not to be afraid of words flung in my face in place of argument. Of course it is Socialism. The poor law is Socialism. The Education Act is Socialism. The greater part of our municipal work is Socialism. Every kindly act of legislation by which the community recognises its responsibility and obligations to its poorer members is Socialism, and it is none the worse for that. Our object is the elevation of the

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1. Annual Register, 1885, pp. 145-6.
2. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 63.
3. Annual Register, 1885, p. 152.

poor, of the masses of the people . . ."[1] In the speech Chamberlain specifically proposed public housing, free education, the land programme, and [perhaps most significant], the taxation of unoccupied land, of rents and royalties.

Thus the campaign went on; Chamberlain toured the country, going from Warrington to Scotland, where he added to his usual programme a strong plea for the highland crofters. There, as everywhere, he was wildly acclaimed, and nowhere more than in London. Of a meeting there, the Times wrote on September 25: "Many members of Parliament and candidates for metropolitan constituencies were seen vainly pushing into the throng . . . Mr. Morley and Mr. Chamberlain had themselves great difficulty, under the guidance of the police, in obtaining entrance into the building."[2] An eyewitness wrote: "The popular agitator was greeted with the most fervent cheers. He was a conquering hero."[3]

Trying, vainly, to prevent the party split from becoming too blatant, Mr. Gladstone intervened; on September 17, he issued an address to the electors of Midlothian, in reality a summoning to all Liberals to shelter beneath the "umbrella". There were four main points to this Manifesto: first was the reform of local and London Government, with local authorities

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1. Ibid., pp. 152-3.
2. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 70.
3. Ibid., p. 70.

being empowered to tax local landowners; second was a weak programme of land reform, intending to abolish entail and primogeniture, [i.e., "free trade in land"], but without positive legislative action to secure land allotments. His third and fourth points were reform of House of Commons procedure and reform of the registration laws. The House of Lords was to be left untouched, assuming its "good behaviour", Church Disestablishment was warily avoided, while free schools were categorically opposed. It was a Manifesto suitable for a 75-year-old leader who was soon to write to Lord Acton a "plague o' both your houses" letter about "the leanings of both parties to socialism, which I radically disapprove. I must lastly mention among my causes of dissatisfaction the conduct of the timid or reactionary Whigs."[1] In the Manifesto the venerable leader made an appeal for party unity, saying: "Doubtless there are many Liberals who would decline to counter-sign my opinions, nor could I undertake to be responsible for all theirs. But no section constitutes the Liberal Party. Each section constitutes an element of the Liberal Party; and it is by the mixture and composition of its elements, not by the unchecked dominance of any one among them, that its results have been and will be obtained."[2]

The reaction of the Liberals to the Manifesto is not hard to imagine: "The Whigs . . . found it vague, the Radicals

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1. September 30, 1885. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 221-22.
2. Contemporary Review, vol. 47, p. 575.

cautious . . ."[1] What could Chamberlain say, Chamberlain who had declared at Ipswich on January 14 of the "free trade in land" scheme: "If that is all we do the land will remain, I do not say in the hands of the same people as now, but at all events in the hands of the same class of people."?[2] His reaction was not long in coming. Three days later, on September 20, he wrote a letter to Gladstone, saying: "I should consider myself personally dishonoured, if I joined any administration formed on the narrow basis of the Programme now presented, and which appears to exclude from practical and immediate consideration every proposal which I have recently advocated."[3] In his reply, on September 22, the Liberal leader said: "You and Hartington were both demurring in opposite senses, and I made to each the same reply. My aim was for the election only, in giving form to my address. As to what lies beyond, I suppose the party will, so far as it has a choice, set first about the matters on which it is agreed. But no one is bound to this proposition . . . . It is likely that there may be a split in the party in the far or middle distance, but I shall have nothing to do with it [sic!], and you, I am sure, do not wish to anticipate it or force it on . . . "[4] This remarkable letter, which shows

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1. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 220.
2. Boyd, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 147.
3. Howard [ed.], op. cit., pp. 129-30.
4. Gwynn and Tuckwell, vol. 2, pp. 185-6.

Gladstone in a rather unfortunate light, did not satisfy the Radical. On the 24th he declared in a speech that the Liberal programme must include the following proposals if he were to join a Liberal Cabinet: fairer taxation, including graduated income taxes, free schools, and the "three acres and a cow" proposal. With the possible exception of the first point, Mr. Gladstone had opposed this stand. "It would be . . . dishonourable in me, and lowering the high tone which ought to prevail in public life, if I, having committed myself personally, as I have done, to the expediency of these proposals, were to take my place in any Government which excluded them from its programme."[1] To Harcourt, who attempted now and later to act as mediator, Chamberlain wrote: "If Hartington wants war he can have it. Rip Van Winkle was a very mild retort on his Waterfoot speech in which he went out of his way to throw dirt on every single thing I had been saying . . . . Hartington is up in a balloon, and he perversely ignores the changes in public opinion and the determination of the great majority of the party he proposes to lead."[2]

On October seventh Chamberlain made a visit to Hawarden, in reply to an unexpected request from Mr. Gladstone. He remained there for two days, enjoying a pleasant personal visit, but without reconciling his social or Irish views with his leader's. For it was evident in fact that the two men

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1. Boyd, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 215.

2. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 103.

had little in common. In background and aim they were different; Gladstone was a generation older, opposed most of the Social Radicalism of Chamberlain, and frequented the noble Whig society which to Chamberlain was [at this time] anathema. For his part the younger man was little more adroit at dealing with people than his leader; proud, arrogant, and sure of himself, he expected confidently that within two years the Grand Old Man would retire, leaving himself or Dilke in command. Between two such men little common ground could be found, and as we shall see, their personal incompatibility had much to do with their separation over the Irish crisis.

Meanwhile, however, what of the Whigs? Goschen's biographer writes of his anxious attitude: "If Mr. Gladstone was to be captured by the Radicals, Goschen was prepared to face a split in the party, and he hoped that Lord Hartington would come forward as the leader, against the Radicals, of a better and truer Liberalism . . . . He was very willing, if necessary to fight the Radicals . . . . Goschem was anxious that the expected Liberal victory should be won in the cause of moderate progress, and not as the result of reckless pledges which it would be ruinous to the country to redeem . . . He was the most eminent of a considerable number of Liberals in Parliament and the country who viewed with profound mistrust the Radicalism of Mr. Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke."[1]

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1. Elliot, A. D.: Life of Goschen, London, 1911, vol. 1, pp. 299-300.

The death struggle between Whig and Radical, Elliot goes on to admit, had in fact begun: "What would have happened on the political stage had Mr. Gladstone refused to embrace Home Rule and the Parnellite alliance no one can say."[1] At a typical speech, at St. Leonard's on September 18, Goschen, [whom Chamberlain had denounced as "the Skeleton at the Feast"] said that he preferred individual initiative to that of the State. Had not conditions improved in the past forty or fifty years? "Wages are higher, clothes are cheaper, food is cheaper, the working man is better remunerated . . . It is . . . a libel upon the Liberal Party . . . to say that they have done nothing for the most numerous and most industrious class of this country."[2]

Hartington was more and more upset as the campaign progressed; after a talk with Chamberlain he wrote to Granville on August 5: "He [that is, Chamberlain] is going to devote himself chiefly to land questions . . . It will certainly give rise to vague expectations that in some way or other land is to be provided by the state for the working classes, gratuitously. He also says that he is going for graduated taxation, and that Mr. Gladstone is in favour of it . . . He is also for free schools. In short, we are going as fast as we can in the Socialist direction."[3] Increasingly, the

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1. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 34.

2. Annual Register, 1885, p. 160.

3. Holland, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 72.

heir of the Devonshires felt himself isolated; on October 3 he wrote again to Granville: " . . . Except Goschen, I do not think that a single colleague had said a word on my side . . . .[1] Of course in the long run the active men will have their own way, and the future Liberal Party will be Radical. I see nothing for the Whigs but to disappear or turn Tories. I think I should prefer the former."[2] Even Rosebery, the "coroneted Socialist", seemed to have turned Radical. During the campaign the Scottish peer said that "he was not much enamoured of socialism, but if it, or any other 'ism, would help, he would not disdain to borrow from that science."[3] Shortly before the election [on November 8] the unhappy Hartington wrote to his leader: "I feel that my position in the party is becoming every day more difficult. I have tried as much as I could to minimise the difference between Chamberlain and myself in the hope - I believe the vain one - of averting an open split in the party or incurring the responsibility for causing it. But I feel that the only effect of this has been that while I have incurred the violent abuse of the Tories and the patronising protection of Chamberlain and Dilke, which is more difficult to bear, my own friends are losing confidence, and are slipping away from me. They

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1. Ibid., p. 74.

2. Fitzmaurice, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 464.

3. Crewe, Lord: Lord Rosebery, vol. 1, London, 1931, p. 244.

are probably right, and the Radicals are so forcing on their own opinions that there will soon be no place in the party for moderate men, who will have to be either for or against the new doctrines.

"The only possibility of keeping the moderate men in the party seems to lie in your taking a strong and decided line against the Radicals. If you are unable or unwilling to do this, my firm belief is that they will go . . . .

"The other point is that if you are determined not to resume office it seems hardly fair to allow this to be kept secret. Thousands of votes will be given under the impression that you will come back as Prime Minister, which would not be given if it were known that, after the election, the Liberal Party would fall into the state of disruption which it inevitably will on your retirement."[1]

In his reply, on November 10, Gladstone attacked Chamberlain, but was even more condemnatory of the Whig peers. Again he admitted the likely rupture of the party: "Nor can I deny that the question of the House of Lords, of the Church, or both, will probably split the Liberal Party. But let it split decently, honourably, and for cause. That it should split now would, as far as I see, be ludicrous.

"I am sorry that Chamberlain raises and presses his notion about the compulsory powers of the local authorities. I should have said, try freedom first. But when it is con-

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1. Hammond, op. cit., p. 396.

sidered how such a scheme must be tied up with safeguards, and how powerful are the natural checks, I hardly see, and am not sure that you see, in this proposed stuff, enough to cause a breach.

"I am no partisan in fine of Chamberlainism, but I think that some 'moderate Liberals' have done much to foster it; and that, if we are men of sense the crisis will not be yet."[1]

For all of Mr. Gladstone's sanguine predictions, the letters quoted above show that he, Chamberlain, and Hartington, as well as many others, expected that the Liberal Party would soon end its coalition-like existence and that the Whigs, as Hartington had said, would "disappear or turn Tories". Until the very last moment before the election the firing went on bewteen the two sides, and the Conservatives naturally made the most of it. The Annual Register wrote that, except for Home Rule "it was felt that . . . the separation between [Chamberlain and Hartington] was complete and absolute."[2] During the campaign a number of Whigs had issued a manifesto declaring that they would oppose any Liberal who supported disestablishment; they included Lord Selborne, the Liberal ex-Lord Chancellor, and the Duke of Westminster, father of the Liberal Chief Whip.

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It is interesting to speculate as to what might have

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1. Ibid, p. 397.
2. Annual Register for 1885, p. 153.

happened to the Liberals had the Irish crisis, an issue entirely extraneous to British politics, not split the Radical ranks as well as giving the Whigs the final push towards Toryism. As we have seen, the Liberal Party was ripe for the loss of the Whigs and for the ascendancy of the Social Radicals; had this in fact taken place, the subsequent political history of Great Britain might have been altogether different. It is true, as said above, that Chamberlain was no Socialist. In the Warrington speech and elsewhere he had said that Socialism was a coming trend which must be recognised and encouraged, but statements of this variety did not make him a Socialist in the modern [or any other] sense. As we have tried to maintain here, and as his biographer stoutly affirms, he was an individualist at heart, and his programme held no place for nationalisation or the abolition of competition. Nevertheless, we must remember that, as emphasised above, Socialism in 1885 was not a strong force. Burns and the S.D.F. opposed Chamberlain, as we have seen, but they represented only a tiny fraction of the working classes. The S.D.F. was small and unrepresentative, the Socialist League was even smaller and rent with quarrels, while the Fabian Society was but new-born. The working-class and middle-class Radicalism of the day was solidly behind Chamberlain; reminiscing years later about Chamberlain's campaign in 1885 through Scotland, Ramsay MacDonald wrote: "I still remember as though it were but yesterday the thrill of pleasure which went through Radical

Scotland when the first speech was delivered. A volume of fury shot up . . . from the Conservative press, but thousands of hearts were stirred for the coming contest by the joy that at last a man had appeared who really meant business."[1] It is perhaps not unjust to remind ourselves that the same joy was to be felt over MacDonald himself, but equally in vain.

We have seen that Chamberlain's defection in 1886 resulted in a fairly important shift of Radical sentiment to the cause of Socialism. In November, 1885, Hyndman wrote in the Nineteenth Century:

> "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain . . . has done so well for us that we know that it only rests with him to say when, if we think it worth our while, we shall gather him into the fold of the true social and political faith . . . . The leader of the Radical party has done the Socialists excellent service wherever and whenever he possibly could. By his constant and flattering references to Socialism as beneficial, as in point of fact underlying most of the legislation which has been advantageous to the working classes and so forth, Mr. Chamberlain has made our revolutionary doctrines almost 'respectable', and has undoubtedly induced hundreds of thousands of the middle class to consider the matter, whom we ourselves could never have reached. When an ex-Cabinet Minister, and, as his friends say, the next Prime Minister, is continually pointing in the most vehement language to the contrast between the poverty of the workers and the wealth of the idlers of the community, arguing the while that there must be something wrong in a society which thus piles up riches for the few at the cost of overwork, misery, and uncertainty of the many, when he declares in so many words that a less faulty distribution of wealth is absolutely necessary in the near future if we wish to avoid a terrible domestic cataclysm - when a great capitalist of Birmingham dwells upon these points . . . it makes very little difference as to the effect produced that he specially attacks only that form of property - land - of which he himself possesses but some ninety acres . . . . What ransom, then, will the capitalists pay? Radicals say

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 82.

> fifty per cent. The difference between us is merely one of time and opportunity. . . . If the Radicals think they can take as much socialism as they like, and leave the rest, they have reckoned without the working-men, who in such matters are far more logical than they."[1]

Had Chamberlain not left the Liberal Party it is incontestable that Radical Liberalism would have stopped the growth of an independent Labour party for many years. The programme was popular, the man was popular, the time seemed auspicious. Chamberlain advocated more working-class M.P.'s and payment of members, he had a social programme which could appeal to all but the most convinced Socialists and which could benefit even them, as Hyndman had said. Chamberlain in large part betrayed his own cause, and it is interesting to consider if he would have lost his Radicalism even if Home Rule had never become a burning issue.[2] But whether one considers the growth of a Socialist party beneficial or not, it is hard not to concur with Garvin, who admits frankly: "The beginnings of the British Labour party may easily be traced to the 'unauthorised campaign'.[3]

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Let us return once again to the problem of Ireland, "squalid, dismal, sullen, dull, expectant, sunk deep in hostile intent."[4] The power of the Irish Nationalists had

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1. *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 18, pp. 835-37. Emphasis added.
2. See Appendix ~~III.~~ IV
3. Garvin, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 78.
4. Morley, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 187.

increased tremendously since 1880. In 1868 the Irish electorate stood at 222,450; by 1886 it was to grow by more than three times to 742,120.[1] As the summer wore on, Parnell became more and more inclined to favour the Conservatives to the Liberals. "Man for man," states his biographer, "Parnell would rather have [had] Mr. Gladstone on his side than anyone in England. Party for Party, he preferred the Tories to the Liberals. 'The Tories,' he said, 'can carry a Home Rule Bill through the Lords. Can the Liberals?'"[2] A speech in July by Herbert Gladstone, son of the Liberal leader, favouring Home Rule, created a stir but did not influence Parnell at a time when Carnarvon and the Tories seemed to be so favourable to his cause. Discussions with Carnarvon, which need not detain us here, had fixed his resolve, but on August 24, at Dublin, he made a fiery speech demanding Home Rule to test the reaction of both parties. From most shades of Liberals he met with a blank refusal: "The two Liberal statesmen, Lord Hartington and Mr. Chamberlain . . . agreed in a tolerably stiff negative . . . The Whig leader with a slow mind and the Radical leader with a quick mind, on this single issue of the campaign spoke with one voice."[3] Hartington in his Waterfoot

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1. Hammond, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 345n.

2. O'Brien, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 2, p. 46.

3. Morley, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 3, p. 233.

speech said a firm no, Chamberlain at Warrington said likewise. Garvin calls the latter speech one of the most important in modern British history; certainly it was categorical and denunciatory and destroyed any last hope of converting Chamberlain to Home Rule: "I say that if these and these alone are the terms on which Mr. Parnell's support is to be obtained, I will not enter into competition for it . . . "[1]

Why was Chamberlain so unfriendly to Home Rule? In part, as we have seen, he was becoming an Imperialist and feared that the Parnellite demand would mean the destruction of the Union. In part, however, his attitude was due to what Chamberlain considered a personal affront by Parnell. He and Dilke had planned to visit Ireland in the summer of 1885; plans were afoot when, on June 27, the United Ireland, supposed to be Parnell's organ, began a savage tirade against them. In reality the paper was edited by two over-eager lieutenants, William O'Brien and "Tim" Healy, but Chamberlain thought that Parnell was behind them and urged Captain O'Shea to ask his chief to call off the attacks. This Parnell flatly refused to do, probably because he wanted not to interfere with the temperamental editors unless he felt it absolutely necessary. Also he was in the middle of negotiations with Lord Carnarvon. Finally, Hammond says: "It is difficult not to believe that Parnell's gross stupidity in making an everlasting enemy of

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1. Thorold, op. cit., p. 233.

the man who had the most bitter and unscrupulous tongue in England was partly due to his personal circumstances. Chamberlain was in his eyes not only the Radical leader; he was the friend of O'Shea. So while Chamberlain was being poisoned against Parnell by O'Shea's duplicity, Parnell was learning to hate Chamberlain as the power behind the husband of his mistress."[1] So again had the unfortunate O'Sheas cropped up to exacerbate and deepen the Irish tragedy.

While most Liberals of Right and Left and most Conservatives had leagued to denounce Parnell [though a few Radicals like Herbert Gladstone and John Morley were now "root-and-branch" Home Rulers], there were two leaders, in addition to Lord Randolph Churchill, who did not denounce him. One was Gladstone. The other was Salisbury. In the Midlothian Manifesto, Gladstone had struck a balance between Imperial unity and the need for decentralisation, and added: "I believe history and posterity will consign to disgrace the name and memory of every man, be he who he may, and on whichever side of the Channel he may dwell, that, having the power to aid in an equitable settlement between Ireland and Great Britain, shall use that power not to aid, but to prevent or to retard it."[2] Salisbury at Newport on October 7 made a most conciliatory speech, not accepting Home Rule nor rejecting it, but leaning very favourably, though vaguely, to some form of

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1. Hammond, op. cit., p. 414.

2. Ibid., p. 402.

acceptance of the Irish demand. He said of local government as opposed to a larger scheme: "In a large central authority the wisdom of several parts of the country will correct the folly and mistakes of one. In a local authority that correction is to a much greater extent wanting, and it would be impossible to leave that out of sight, in any extension of any such local authority in Ireland."[1]

Gladstone himself over a period of years had come gradually to the conclusion that Home Rule was necessary for the Irish if they wanted it and if no other alternative appeared available. As early as February, 1882, he had made two speeches on Home Rule in the House of Commons, in one of which he had said: "I will not undertake to say to what decision this House might arrive, provided a plan were laid before it, under which the local affairs of Ireland could be, by some clear and definitive line, separated from the Imperial affairs of Ireland."[2] This speech had been denounced by the Times and by many politicians as virtually accepting the case for Home Rule. By the summer of 1885 this attitude had come, in fact, close to becoming a definite acceptance of the Nationalist cause. Gladstone persuaded James Knowles, editor of the Nineteenth Century, to print an article by Barry O'Brien setting out the case for Home Rule, and his speeches were consistently favourable to some measure of support for the

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1. Hammond, op. cit., p. 384.

2. Ibid., p. 254.

Irish national cause. The Liberal leader, moreover, had determined not to continue in political life unless he were called upon to settle the Irish question. Neither the ordinary political questions nor the survival of the Liberal Party would detain him, he said; only Ireland was, as it would be for eight long years more, an issue forcing him to remain. But Mr. Gladstone was in a difficult position. He did not want to declare for Home Rule unless the Irish showed by their votes that they really wanted it. Moreover, he wished the Conservative Government then in office to handle the question, partly because they had already destroyed the balance of politics by their hypocritical friendliness to Parnell, partly because he felt, as did Parnell, that such a radical reform would come much closer to English acceptance if proposed by the party which controlled the House of Lords and most of the inherited wealth of the nation. As the leader of a party out of office he felt that he could not make his position known. As a result, when Chamberlain came to visit him at Hawarden, the Grand Old Man was not specific as to his Irish policy, and what advances he did make along Home Rule lines were not received with concurrence. Instead, he spoke to the Radical about resignation. "I did not think at the time," Chamberlain wrote later, "that he was likely to maintain his expressed intention to resign, but it seemed to me indirectly a proof that he did not seriously contemplate a

Home Rule Programme . . . "[1] Moreover, Gladstone did not reveal his ideas to Mrs. O'Shea, who tried in August and again in October to find what he intended to do, and who forwarded Parnell's own plan for an Irish legislature. The result was that Parnell, despairing at learning more of Gladstone's tactics and fearing the worst when the latter in his last election speech had appealed for a Liberal majority over all other parties, including the Irish, declared himself, on November 21, in favour of the Tories in no uncertain terms. In a Manifesto Gladstone was denounced as the man "who has coerced Ireland, deluged Egypt with blood, menaced religious liberty in the schools, and attacked freedom of speech in Parliament."[2] Accordingly, most Irish in Great Britain voted Conservative.

The election followed immediately, voting in the boroughs taking place late in November and in the counties early in December.[3] In the British boroughs the Liberals lost heavily, the Tories jumping from 86 seats out of 330 in 1880 to 123 out of 275 in 1885. In England they rose from 85 out of 287 to 120 out of 231. Gladstone, writing to Lord Richard Grosvenor, a Whig and the Liberal Chief Whip, on November 27, said: "Fair Trade+Parnell+Church+Chamberlain have damaged us a good deal in the boroughs . . . . I place the causae damni in what I think their order of importance."[4] The Radicals, however,

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1. Howard, op. cit., p. 168.
2. Magnus, op. cit., p. 337.
3. See Appendix I.
4. Hammond, op. cit., p. 398.

viewed the matter differently; Labouchere wrote to Chamberlain on December 1: "I am not the least surprised at the results. Putting aside the Irish vote and bad times, was it likely that there would be great enthusiasm for a cause, which was explained to be to relegate everything of importance to the dim, distant future, and to unite in order to bring back to power the old lot, with all their doubts and hesitations, under a leader who was always implying, without meaning it, that he meant to retire?" [1]

A week later the county results were in, and here the Liberals fared far better, fully justifying the Radical emphasis on "three acres and a cow". One hundred and eighty-four Liberals were returned for the counties, with only 108 Tories. Jubilantly, "Labby" wrote to the Radical chief on December 3: "Is not the cow working wonders for us? Next time we must have an urban cow."[2] Alas for the Liberals, when "next time" came round the only man who might have invented an "urban cow" was on the other side. And perhaps even the peerless "Joe" might not easily have devised such a programme. Replying to Labouchere on December 4, he wrote: "The 'urban cow' is the great difficulty. I put my money on free schools, but, judging by London, the electors do not care much about it."[3] And Pelling adds: ". . . To provide a social

1. Thorold, op. cit., p, 245.

2. Ibid., p. 245.

3. Ibid., p. 246.

programme for the industrial workers would have been to threaten the interests of the most important supporters of the party - the great industrial capitalists."[1]

Perhaps it would have been better had the vote in the counties been similar to that in the boroughs. As Hammond says: "The total result could not have been worse if it had been arranged by the worst enemy of England and Ireland."[2] The new House consisted of 335 Liberals, 249 Tories, and 86 Home Rulers, one representing a Liverpool constituency. Together the Irish and Conservatives just equalled the Liberals, and any Government which did not first deal with Ireland would be rendered impotent. The Irish themselves were not without blame for this *impasse*; it was estimated that the Parnell Manifesto had cost the Liberals anything from 25 to 50 seats; each one was to be mourned within a few short months.

The confusion which followed the election is unparalleled for any similar period of time in British politics, but it must be at least touched upon here in discussing the fortunes of the Liberal Party. The elections had turned Mr. Gladstone definitely into a Home Ruler; 85 Parnellites out of 103 Irishmen, many of whom had been jailed by Forster's Crimes Act of 1881, many of them returned without opposition and most of the rest elected by immense majorities, had convinced him that in Home Rule lay the only answer to Ireland's miseries.

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1. Pelling, Henry: *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900*, London, 1954, p. 40.

2. Hammond, p. 398.

None of the ~~14~~ 17 Irish Liberals elected in 1880 had been returned in 1885, and as the Annual Register for 1885 commented: "When the elections were over, the whole political map of Ireland had changed."[1] But, far from being power-mad, as has frequently been charged, Gladstone was more than ever eager to have the Conservatives legislate a Home Rule Act, specially as the election had refused the clear Liberal mandate which he had asked. Moreover, he thought of the several precedents for Tory reform, notably in 1846 and 1867. But then fell a catastrophic blow. On December 12 Sir Charles Dilke made a speech to a London Radical Club in which he said that, from the Radical point of view the best thing to do would be to leave the Tories in power to settle the Irish problem themselves, or, as Chamberlain put it: "Let them settle accounts with their new friends." Later, Dilke wrote: "My view was that it would be disastrous to advanced Liberalism to form a Government resting on a minority, as it would be impossible to carry any legislation not of a Conservative type."[2] Herbert Gladstone, afraid [with some justification] that the Radicals were organising a separate cabal, and hoping by an announcement of his father's intentions to keep faltering Liberals faithful, went to London. There he met Sir Wemyss Reid, editor of the Leeds Mercury and a Whiggish Liberal, who warned him of the

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1. [illegible] p, 201.

2. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 195.

confused state of many Northern Liberals. On December 17 in the Mercury and the Evening Standard and soon all over the nation was spread the news that Mr. Gladstone was willing to take office to introduce a Home Rule Bill.[1]

But the blow was sudden and disastrous; it told the Tories that they need not keep office, that they could throw the Irish over, for the Liberals would be bound to split over the proposal. This occurred at the very moment when Mr. Gladstone was attempting, through A. J. Balfour, to promise his support to the Conservatives if Salisbury would undertake a Home Rule Bill. It split the Liberals in two, for, as O'Brien states: "Liberals indeed there were - a mere handful - who had given in their adhesion to Home Rule before the conversion of Mr. Gladstone, but the bulk of the Liberal Party . . . yielded to the personal influence and authority of the

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1. Many years later, Herbert Gladstone wrote in his own justification: "At this time everything was going wrong. Excepting Lord Spencer and Lord Granville, the Whigs were consolidating themselves against Home Rule. Mr. Bright was adverse. The Radical leaders were manoeuvring for their own position. Hardly a single paper in the country gave or could give clear support . . . I can now bring in Morley himself as a witness. Writing to Spence Watson on December 15, he said: 'Much dirty work is going on. I won't be a party to snubbing the Old Man.' I am quite clear now that had I not acted the movements against us would have taken definite shape. Something had to be done . . . . I was a convinced and keen Home Ruler. Home Rule was only possible through Liberal action under Mr. Gladstone's leadership. My object was to give the party the essential information." [Gladstone Herbert, op. cit., pp. 308-09, 311.]

Liberal leader."[1] James Bryce wrote the following February: "Up to the middle of last December the question of Irish Home Rule had been little discussed in Great Britain . . . . The country . . . did not realise what was passing. Wonderfully little was said on the subject at the general election . . . . The consequence is that the demand for an Irish Parliament now preferred by Ireland through eighty-five out of one hundred and three members comes upon England with the shock of surprise . . . "[2] Two months later a commentator wrote: "There are 330 Liberal members, and the addresses or speeches of nearly 300 have been examined. Some 100 of the addresses contain no reference whatever to the Irish question. Many speeches have been searched which were delivered by gentlemen whose addresses were silent on this point, but among all these, and among all the addresses, there are but fourteen whose authors seemed prepared last November to concede legislative independence to Ireland."[3] The bitterness which existed between Liberals and Irish had been increased by Parnell's hostility during the campaign, and Liberals, Radicals as well as Whigs, had denounced the Home Rulers up and down the country. Most famous, perhaps, was Harcourts advice to "let

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1. O'Brien, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 155.
2. In the Nineteenth Century, vol. 19, p. 312.
3. Lord Ebrington in Ibid., p. 617.

the Tories stew in their own Parnellite juice." Morley comments: ". . . . The great task of conversion in 1886, difficult in any case, was made a thousand times more difficult still by the arguments and antipathies of the electoral battle of 1885."[1] On the very day that the revelation of Mr. Gladstone's apparent volte face appeared in the press, Chamberlain made a speech in Birmingham. He had intended, he wrote, to "plunge the knife in" to the Whigs, to create the final crisis which would at last split the party and reconstitute it on a Radical basis. Garvin writes: "He had intended to pitch into the Whigs and to proclaim in more defiant tones than ever that an advanced programme was the condition of future Liberal triumph."[2] But the "Hawarden Kite", as Herbert Gladstone's foray has ever since been called, changed matters entirely. Instead, Chamberlain was forced, according to his lights, to deliver an attack on Home Rule. The political situation had changed overnight.

The backstage maneuverings which now began were fantastic. Gladstone communicated little with anyone, and almost the only Liberals whom he wrote or saw in the next week, were Hartington, Granville, Spencer, and Rosebery, all Whigs but for the last named, and none belonging to the Radical faction. Meanwhile, Labouchere was working furiously on Chamberlain to persuade him to accept the Gladstone proposals, as the "Hawarden Kite"

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1. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 244-5.

2. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 138.

was known to embody the G.O.M.'s views despite a feebly-worded denial. "Labby" held out alluring rewards to the Radical leader; Home Rule would make the Whigs drop away, then Gladstone would retire and the Radicals would be in office to advance their programme unhindered. But "Joe" would not accept. On Christmas Eve he replied: "There is much fascination in your suggestion of Radical policy especially in the chance of dishing the Whigs, whom I hate more than the Tories. But it won't do. English opinion is set strongly against Home Rule . . ."[1] Whether English opinion was or not, Chamberlain was the man who could have swayed it. But he was himself as opposed to Home Rule as any Whig.

Now Gladstone was not communicating with anyone. Chamberlain who was in a raging fury called the Kite "death and damnation", and wrote to "Labby": "The G.O.M. is sulking in his tent. No one can get a word from him - he has not replied to letters from Hartington, Rosebery, and myself."[2] On the last day of the year Labouchere sent back a frank plea to the man who had been his hero, saying: "For my part I would coerce the Irish, grant them Home Rule, or do anything with them, in order to make the Radical programme possible. Ireland is but a pawn in the game."[3] But Chamberlain could not

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 145.

2. Thorold, op. cit, p. 272, December 26, 1885.

3. Ibid., pp. 289-90.

see the matter this way. In company with other Radicals he felt that Gladstone's inadvertent move had been a frantic desire to return to power and an equally frantic desire to "dish" the Radical Programme. On New Year's Day a remarkable meeting occurred of Dilke, Chamberlain, Harcourt, and Hartington, who sent a joint communication to Mr. Gladstone asking for a meeting, which their leader [perhaps wisely, at such a hectic time] rejected. In despair, Hartington wrote to Granville on January 2, 1886: "Of course Mr. Gladstone's announcements are an important factor in the case and their effect can never be done away with. Did any leader ever treat a party in such a way as he has done?"[1]

The maelstrom was now in a whirling fury. Gone was any chance of settling the Irish problem amicably on an above-party basis. Gone too was any chance of maintaining the unity of the Liberal Party. Gladstone the pacifier had himself broken the party into shattered pieces.

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We shall not discuss here at length the tribulations which the first six months of 1886 brought to Gladstone and the Liberals. The details of the Home Rule session are well known. Rather we shall discuss several aspects with a view to their relation to the fortunes of the Liberal Party.

(1) As we have seen, the Whig association with the

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1. Holland, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 110.

Liberal Party was finished in any case. They could not have supported the party longer, and when the vote on the Collings amendment, in January, 1886, regretting the exclusion in the Queen's Speech of measures to aid the agricultural labourer was taken, 76 Liberals abstained and 18 voted with the Conservative Government, including Hartington, Goschen, and Sir Henry James. When Gladstone subsequently was forming his Cabinet five Whigs, members of the 1880-5 Cabinet, refused to join: Hartington, Derby, Northbrook, Selborne, and Carlingford. The Duke of Argyll, Sir Henry James, and Goschen refused as well, as did the aged John Bright, now an implacable foe of Home Rule. But their refusals were not all founded on their attitudes towards the Irish Question; Morley writes of Hartington: "The significant reference, among his reasons for not joining the new ministry, to the concessions that he had made in the last government for the sake of party unity, and to his feeling that any further moves of the same kind for the same purpose would destroy all public confidence in him, shows just as the Collings Amendment had shown, how small were the chances, quite apart from Irish policy, of uniting Whig and Radical wings in any durable Liberal Government."[1]

(2) Why were the Whigs so opposed to Home Rule? True, they resented the outrages of Irish terrorism; as Ensor says:

1. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 294.

"The English business class was intensely patriotic - it resented the Irish events as an affront to England, and as the affront . . . occurred under a Liberal Government, it withdrew its allegiance from the Liberal Party."[1] H. O. Arnold-Forster wrote at the time: "As a Liberal and a believer in self-government, I would give Home Rule, but as an Englishman and a member of a great nation, I would make the grant of this administrative reform entirely subordinate to the higher and far more important duties which we owe to ourselves and to all those who have relied upon us . . . . It is still true that the movement conducted by Mr. Parnell has been . . . 'a shameful, audacious, and gigantic act of robbery'."[2]

But a sense of patriotism and outraged morality were not all that motivated the Whigs. Gladstone's Irish policy with his Church Disestablishment and his Land Acts had already cost many of their purses dear. Now came the Home Rule Bill, coupled with a Land Purchase Bill which bid fair to cripple them financially. And there was a third measure in the offing. A Radical Cabinet had been formed by default by Gladstone in 1886, with A. J. Mundella in Chamberlain's old position of President of the Board of Trade [Chamberlain

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1. Ensor, R. C. K.: Some Political and Economic Interactions in Late Victorian England, in Schuyler and Ausubel [eds.] The Making of English History, New York, 1952, p. 542.

2. In the Nineteenth Century, vol. 19, February, 1886, p. 216, p. 219. The quotation is from J. G. Shaw-Lefevre.

himself was at the Local Government Board until his resignation.7 Mundella set to work to prepare a bill to regulate railway freight rates, a bill which met strong opposition from the railway interests, among which Whigs were strongly represented. Many of the leading Whig peers, such as the Dukes of Argyll and Sutherland, owned railway shares and so, in the House of Commons, did the Marquis of Stafford, Hartington, Lord Richard Grosvenor and Albert Grey. Of the ninety-three Liberals who voted against Home Rule, twenty-nine held railway interests. Thus "the so-called 'threat to property' interests constituted by Gladston'es third Ministry affected far more interests than those of the Irish landowner and the British taxpayer."[1] While Mundella's biographer does not attempt to say that the railway bill was the crucial issue, he does point out that the three measures, Home Rule, the Land Purchase Bill, and the Railway Bill, "together affected property worth £1,000 million."[2] Finally, other Social Radical policies were likely to be adopted; Home Rule was the occasion, not the cause of the Whig defection.

(3) Through the whole period Gladstone's treatment of Chamberlain - as of other colleagues - was abrupt and thoughtless, typical of the leader who had never learned how properly to behave towards his colleagues. When asked what Cabinet

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1. Armytage, W. H. G.: A. J. Mundella, London, 1951, p. 256.
2. Ibid., p. 256.

position he wished [and it should be remembered that Chamberlain entered the Home Rule Cabinet with the greatest misgivings], the Radical replied: "The Colonial Office," witness of his growing interest in Imperial affairs. "Oh," said Gladstone, "a Secretary of State!" The snub contained in this remark and the G.O.M.'s determination to cut the salary of Jesse Collings, Chamberlain's ally and undersecretary, turned the Radical to fury. Mr. Gladstone's action in this episode was obtuse to an amazing degree. As Asquith writes: "As he [Chamberlain] was undoubtedly the second person in power and influence in the new Government, it remains to this day inexplicable that the Prime Minister should not have given him his choice of office."[1] Moreover, Chamberlain felt, he was treated very badly in the Cabinet discussions of Home Rule by Gladstone. The latter had performed the amazing feat of swinging most of the non-Whig elements in the party, including, surprisingly, Harcourt and Spencer, to Home Rule, and perhaps he felt that he could afford to disregard the Radical leader. Years later Rosebery and Morley agreed that Gladstone had appeared determined to drive Chamberlain out when the latter wished to be conciliatory. "Some supposed then," Morley wrote later of the final crisis, ". . . that when he [Chamberlain] entered the Cabinet on this memorable occasion, he intended to be conciliatory. Witnesses of the scene thought

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1. Asquith, H. H. [Lord Oxford and Asquith]: Fifty Years of Parliament, II, London, 1926, p. 136.

that the Prime Minister made little attempt in that direction."[1] Later Chamberlain wrote that this attitude was true of most of the Cabinet: "I do not believe that there was any sincere desire for reconciliation on the part of several important members of the Cabinet. John Morley seems to have been against concession, while Harcourt varied from day to day. Childers was a friend of peace, while all the others were nonentities and ready to do whatever Mr. Gladstone decided."[2] Unquestionably, then, Gladstone's treatment of the one man whose support he most needed was a blunder of the first magnitude; the Whig desertion was expected, and what was needed to counteract it was the united Radical support which only Chamberlain's leadership could have given.

On the other hand, the attitude of Chamberlain himself is open to more than a little criticism. He objected to several features of the Home Rule Bill, which, if they had been deleted as "concessions", would have destroyed the effective functioning of the Bill. At last he settled on the principle of the exclusion of the Irish members from Westminster, which, as Justin McCarthy candidly admitted, was a <u>bête noire</u> to many Radicals. "Many of the most sincere and convinced English, Welsh, and Scottish Radicals, men who were as friendly to the Irish national cause as the Irish themselves

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1. Morley, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 3, p. 303.

2. Howard, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 219.

could be, declared themselves against Mr. Gladstone's measure because it left Ireland to be taxed by the Imperial Parliament without having any representation at Westminster."[1] But Chamberlain was playing a double game, as Gladstone sensed, and as future events would show. Writing to Dilke on May 6 he said: "To satisfy others I have talked about conciliation and have consented to make advances, but on the whole I would rather vote against the Bill than not, and the retention of the Irish members is only, with me, the flag that covers other objections."[2] His attitude seems fairly clear from an 1886 memorandum: "I am not willing to sacrifice the unity of that Empire which has so great a past and which I firmly believe is destined to have so great a future."[3] Whether Chamberlain was moved by pique or by principle, whether he felt that he could never remain a Liberal as long as the Grand Old Man stayed at the helm, whether his Radicalism was already fading, whether his over-sensitive nature was hurt by his leader's practice of consulting with no one and not allowing Chamberlain to introduce a Bill for British Local Government - which of these moved him most to his onslaughts upon the Bill we shall probably never know. But his attitude, as seen by two prominent Irishmen, does not present him in a very favourable light. O'Brien writes: "His [i.e., Chamberlain's] real

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1. McCarthy, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 228.

2. Gwynn and Tuckwell, vol. 2, p. 222.
3. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 34.

object was to outmanoeuvre Mr. Gladstone by substituting local government for Home Rule. If he could succeed in persuading Mr. Gladstone to retain the Irish members, in their full numbers and for all purposes, in the Imperial Parliament, at the same time establishing a body in Dublin for the transaction of certain specified business, and even for the making of certain specified laws, then, no matter what that body might be called, it would in reality be nothing more nor less at the utmost than a sort of glorified county council."[1] Justin McCarthy writes of Chamberlain's scheme of "Federalism": "The scheme had to be given up because of the one difficulty that it was found impossible to get the Irish people to accept it, or even to take the slightest interest in it. Mr. Chamberlain . . . had by this time utterly lost his hold on the central fact of the whole Irish crisis."[2]

In after years, Chamberlain was wont to declare that "the sole difference with Mr. Gladstone was the Home Rule question,"[3] that he had "given up everything" to fight the Bill, and that he had tried in vain to be conciliatory. We have seen from his letter to Dilke that the latter claim was untrue, nor did Dilke agree with him on this issue, despite his wholehearted and lifelong acceptance of an Imperialism

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1. O'Brien, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 120-1.

2. McCarthy, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 229.

3. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 414.

which Chamberlain had come only recently to accept. Years later, talking to Barry O'Brien in February, 1898, Chamberlain was to say: "I wanted to kill the Bill . . . . However open I may be to criticism in whatever I said my aim was, as I say, to kill the Bill."[1]

* * *

In any event, the hostility to Home Rule of the Whigs and of Chamberlain had been assured. Through the spring of 1886 Hartington and Chamberlain grew steadily closer together, and meetings were arranged at which both spoke against the Bill. Similarly, the Tories and Whigs moved closer together, and also organised joint meetings. After the resignation of Chamberlain and a Radical ally, G. O. Trevlyan, from the Cabinet on March 26, the liaison grew ever closer. On May 27, a meeting of 260 Liberals was held at the Foreign Office, and Gladstone went very far to be conciliatory, but the next day in the House of Commons he was stung by Lord Randolph Churchill into adopting a different attitude. On May 31 Chamberlain called a meeting of dissident Liberals, 55 of whom attended, at which he read a letter from John Bright, saying that he personally was going to vote against the Bill. "My present intention," Bright wrote, "is to vote against the second reading. Not having spoken in the debate, I am not willing to leave my view of the Bill or Bills in any doubt.

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1. O'Brien, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 140-1.

But I am not willing to take the responsibility of advising others as to their course. If they can content themselves with abstaining from the division, I shall be glad . . . If you think it of any use, you may read this letter to your friends."[1] Though the aged Bright later repented and agreed to abstain, it was now too late; Chamberlain had succeeded in his enterprise; Bright's weighty influence was thrown against Home Rule and the damage was done.

The fight over the Bill, as we have seen, stirred the House as it had rarely been stirred before, and virtually destroyed the existing basis of party politics. Intrigues were furious on both sides, particularly on the part of the anti-Home Rulers, the Queen going so far as to attempt to whip up a faction of Liberal anti-Gladstonians. Gladstone, meanwhile, had been fighting for the Bill with a vigour astounding for a man in his seventy-seventh year ~~and~~ who had lost a sizeable portion of his allies. Almost alone [though with the valiant help of a few, notably Morley] he waged the struggle, for as Bright said: "Not twenty Members outside the Irish party would support it [Home Rule] if Mr. Gladstone's great authority were withdrawn from it."[2] Gladstone fought for Home Rule not only as a simple cause of just nationalism; he also took the offensive by sparing no effort to label his opponents as the selfish representatives of wealth. The

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1. Garvin, vol. 2, pp. 244-5.

2. Thorold, op. cit., p. 323.

Economist, till recently his strong supporter, remarked after the publication of a Manifesto which the Prime Minister issued to his Midlothian electors on May 1: "The Manifesto which Mr. Gladstone has announced, through the electors of Midlothian, to the people of the United Kingdom, has been read by moderate men of all parties with sorrow and indignation. It is a direct, and, indeed, an avowed appeal, from the educated to the ignorant, from experienced politicians to the multitude of electors, from Parliament to a plebiscitum . . . . No English Premier has ever yet endeavoured to set the multitude against the few."[1] In his last speech on the Bill, on June 7, Gladstone said: "We do not undervalue or despise the forces opposed to us. I have described them as the forces of class and its dependents. You have power, you have wealth, you have rank, you have station, you have organisation. What have we? We think we have the people's heart."[2] Then, turning to Ireland again, he concluded: "Ireland stands at your bar, expectant, hopeful, almost supplicant. . . . Think, I beseech you - think well, think wisely, think not for a moment but for all the years that are to come, before you reject this Bill."[3]

The rejection, nevertheless, was inevitable, though later generations may ponder sadly over the wisdom of the old man's

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1. Economist, vol. 44, May 8, 1886, p. 582.

2. Christie, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

3. Churchill, [Sir] Winston: Lord Randolph Churchill, vol. 2, London, 1906, pp. 111-2

advice. The voting, in the early hours of June 8, was 313 for the Bill, 343 against; 93 Liberals, for the most part Whigs, had voted with the majority. Had the Radicals staunchly supported the Bill to a man it would unquestionably have passed the Commons, and had they and the Gladstonians gone to the country together in the summer of 1886 on a common platform of opposition to the House of Lords, they would probably have been returned by a large majority, capable of enacting both Home Rule and many features of the "unauthorised programme".

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We turn now to the fortunes of the Liberal Party in the six months after the dissolution of Parliament on June 28. Feelings ran at their height at this time; as Morley says: "Political differences were turned into social proscription . . . . Great ladies purified their lists of the names of old intimates."[1] The Liberal Party went into the election ill-prepared, with most of its wealth and many of its leaders fighting on the other side. Chamberlain and Hartington, antagonists to the death but six months before, now leagued in a common effort to save the Union, an effort in which their peculiar gifts appealed to wide, though different, elements of the electorate, and which deepened the bitterness of fratricidal war already prevailing. So, by the forceful, the overwhelming intervention of an extraneous issue, had British politics been

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1. Morley, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 321.

transformed.

One stroke of great fortune for the Liberals lay in the fact that despite Chamberlain's defection the National Liberal Federation stayed firm. " . . . More than seventy Members of Parliament who had not previously been connected with it sent in their adhesion to the Federation; not one Liberal Association withdrew from it, but within a month afterwards fifty fresh ones became affiliated; and, almost without exception, the whole of that important body, the Liberal Agents, remained loyal to the Party . . . "[1] Gladstone fought the election entirely on the Home Rule issue, thus antagonising many voters who had not yet accepted the idea, who felt Home Rule to be little better than treason, as well as many Radicals who felt bitter that the Irish crisis had so effectively smothered the campaign for domestic reform. The Grand Old Man did, however, continue his campaign against "the Classes", a campaign rather ironic, since, as he wrote to R. H. Hutton of the Spectator: " . . . I do think that the common ruck of your 'Unionists' from Dukes downwards are warped by the spirit of class, but that comparatively few are aware of it . . . . Am I warped by the spirit of anti-class? I cannot tell - my dislike of class feeling gets slowly more and more accentuated, and my case is particularly hard and irksome because I am a thorough-going inegalitarian."[2]

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1. Watson, R. S.: The National Liberal Federation, London, 1903, p. 57.
2. Armytage, op. cit., p. 250.

The election took place in July, and was an overwhelming defeat for the Home Rulers.[1] Though the Parnellite Irish stayed firm at "86 in '86", the Liberals dropped to 191 seats, and the Conservatives soared to 319. Seventy-four of the "Liberal Unionists", as they were henceforward termed, were returned, and the best estimates concluded that only about 15 were supporters of Chamberlain. That not only Liberals could develop a "Caucus" was shown in that very few of the Liberal Unionists were opposed by Conservatives, so as not to divide the Unionist vote. The popular vote, however, was much closer. Though the Liberal Party was at its lowest ebb, though the circumstances were drastically unfavourable to it, yet in Great Britain it recorded 1,236,741 votes, most of which came from Radical and working-class areas. The Tories had 955,553, while 360,340 votes were cast for the Liberal Unionists; thus an overall majority of only 80,000 votes was cast for the Unionists, a majority turned into a significant minority when the vote from John Bull's Other Island came in. Even though the Unionists won many seats unopposed, this achievement was startling when one considers the obstacles which Gladstone had to face. A party torn into two, an electorate doubting whether he would support any of Chamberlain's Radical measures, opponents adept at catch-phrases like Churchill's "an old man in a hurry", an organisation which was forced to

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1. See Appendix I.

allow 110 seats to go Unionist without a battle,[1] and the opposition of the overwhelming part of the wealth and intellect of the nation; these obstacles would have defeated any political leader. Huxley, Tyndall, Tennyson, Browning, Lecky, Seeley, Froude, Goldwin Smith, Martineau, Jowett, Spencer; all had supported Gladstone at one time; now all of these glittering names opposed him. The Irish Land Purchase Bill had been a heavy burden as well, as future Liberal leaders like Asquith and Bryce had found. The Spectator, one of the many Liberal papers which had just turned Unionist, wrote that the Grand Old Man found himself in a position with "his ablest colleagues alienated; his oldest friends dismayed; a Bill which was to tranquillise Ireland for ever lost . . . The Liberal Party . . . shattered to its foundations."[2]

* * *

So shattered, the Liberal Party made in the latter half of 1886 a strong bid towards recovery. In the first place, it grew both more Radical and more homogeneous. Deprived of most of its aristocracy, most of its wealth, and its strongest conservative forces, as well as a few important Radicals, it attempted by growing closer-knit to make up for its losses.

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1. The Liberals won 42 seats unopposed. Had all the uncontested seats been fought, the same ratio would have meant another 500,000 Unionist votes and 350,000 additional Liberal votes. In 1885 the Liberals had won 15 seats unopposed to the Tories' 10.

2. Annual Register for 1886, p. 223.

In October, 1886, a book edited by Andrew Reid, entitled The New Liberal Programme was published, and in its semi-official pages was to be found a far more Radical programme than heretofore. Organisationally as well the party attempted to revive. The offices of the National Liberal Federation were moved to London, and the expert Schnadhorst became its official representative. From that point it became the staunch supporter of Radical, but official Liberalism, and worked closely with the Liberal Central Association, an organisation led by the Chief Whip and dealing with, "amongst other things, . . . that part of political organisation which is concerned in every respect with the Membership of the House of Commons, and with the actual machinery of elections."[1] Never again would the party in Parliament have to fear the dictates of an irresponsible Caucus; too many party leaders now controlled its functions. Two years later, Spencer, Granville, and Harcourt, beacons of respectability, would be among its vice-presidents. But even at this stage there was trouble in the offing. On November 16 the venerable leader wrote to Harcourt: "Randolph [Churchill], by taking up the Liberal Programme, has, as was to be expected, caused a superfoetation of Radical ideas on our side. I do not know how you view this. I will not break with the 200 [National Liberal Federation] or the Radical section of them if I can

1. Watson, op. cit., p. 64.

help it. But I am rather too old to put on a brand new suit of clothes."[1]

As well as shifting to the Left and reviving its organisation, moreover, Liberals made a stout effort to secure party reconciliation. The dissident 74 sat with the Gladstonians on the Opposition benches, and Chamberlain and his few supporters declared themselves still Radicals, kept apart only by the Home Rule issue. There was the strongest impetus to reconciliation on the part of both factions [except for the Whigs, who now would clearly never be brought back beneath the "umbrella"2]; the Gladstonians needed the support of the Birmingham Radical if they were not to be excluded from power indefinitely, while Chamberlain, aware of his isolated position and the fact that the Gladstonians had gathered the overwhelming mass of Radical support, was anxious to end his lonely vigil. He felt, however, that as long as the G.O.M. remained, reconciliation would be impossible. To Collings, still his faithful ally, he wrote on July 29: "If he [Gladstone] retired, all would come right pretty quickly. If he remains it is no use issuing manifestos or anything else . . . I believe we

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 12.

2. As early as July 22, 1886, Hartington wrote to Goschen in disparaging terms of "the Liberal Party as now constituted", and asked: "Is it likely that you will ever be able to return to it, or remain in it? I don't feel very confident that I shall be able to do it myself . . ." [Colson, op. cit., p. 84.]

must 'lie low' till the inevitable disappearance of the G.O.M. from the scene."[1]

The Gladstonians, however, naturally felt no such desire for waiting and wished for immediate reconciliation, with the possible exception of Morley, to whom Chamberlain, his former intimate, had been brutally cruel in the past months. Harcourt was especially active as a force for good will, while Gladstone himself, according to Lord Spencer, was "ready to grovel in the dust to bring about reunion, either from remorse at having divided the Party or because he feels time is against him."[2] In December an event occurred which seemed to Liberals a happy augury. Lord Randolph Churchill, piqued by his inability to cut military expenditure in his first budget and having "forgotten Goschen", resigned in a fit of temper. This event stirred the political world profoundly, the more as Goschen's acceptance of the post seemed clearly to tie the Whigs to the Conservative Party, whatever they might say. "In a situation so strangely unstable and irregular," Morley wrote, "with an administration resting on the support of a section sitting on benches opposite, and still declaring every day that they adhered to old Liberal Principles and had no wish to sever old party ties, the withdrawal of Lord Randolph Churchill created boundless perturbation."[3]

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1. Garvin, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 264-5.
2. Garratt, op. cit., p. 280.
3. Morley, vol. 3, p. 364.

Chamberlain, feeling even less enthusiastic about the Unionist Government after the loss of the Tory Democrat with so many of whose views he was in agreement, immediately made a speech suggesting that "three men should gather round a table" to discuss Liberal differences and the chances of reconciling them. Furious "soundings out" followed, the reliable Harcourt acting as intermediary, and on New Year's Day he wrote to Chamberlain to say that a telegram had arrived from Mr. Gladstone. "Barkis is willing,"[1] he wrote. Thus 1887 began with hopes of reunion high as the famous Round Table Conference began.

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In the next chapter we shall attempt to find why the Liberal Party was unable to regain Chamberlain and his faction. We shall also discuss why its growing homogeneity and Radicalism did not continue, and why, by 1895, advanced Radicals were turning away from the party in disgust and leaning strongly towards Socialism.

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1. Garvin, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 2, p. 282.

CHAPTER 6

YEARS OF FRUSTRATION, 1887-1895

The Round Table Conference first met at Harcourt's London home, on January 13th, 1887. Present were Chamberlain and Trevelyan, representing the Radical Unionists, with Harcourt, John Morley, and Lord Herschell speaking for the Gladstonian Liberals. The hope of unity was quite definitely restricted to the Radicals among the Unionist forces; Goschen, as we have seen, had joined the Unionist Government, and Hartington refused to attend the meetings of the Conference. Several meetings were held in January and February, and progress seemed slowly to be made, but the now irrevocable determination of Chamberlain to preserve the Act of Union and the uncertain personal relations between him and the sensitive Morley made the final collapse of the discussions inevitable. A curious form of procedure was followed: no attempt was made to prevent the principals from making speeches outside the confines of the Round Table, and the result was several speeches by Chamberlain and Morley early in February which exacerbated tempers and rendered settlement yet more difficult. Finally, on February 25th, Chamberlain wrote an article in the Baptist magazine, in which he said: "Thirty-two millions of people must go without much-needed legislation because three millions are disloyal, while nearly 600 members of the Imperial Parliament will be reduced to forced inactivity because some 80

delegates, representing the policy and receiving the pay of the Chicago Convention, are determined to obstruct business until their demands have been conceded."[1] After this ill-timed and ill-tempered explosion, the Conference never met again. Its only positive result was to bring Trevelyan back to the Liberal fold, where he did useful work both in the opposition years, 1887-1892, and as Secretary of State for Scotland between 1892 and 1895. Its negative results were profound. Chamberlain was now positively and finally alienated, despite several secret conferences with Gladstone in the spring of 1887 and a few subsequent desultory attempts at reconciliation. Chamberlain was as vicious and effective an enemy of the Liberals as he had been of the Whigs and Conservatives; his nature knew no moderation, and he was soon supporting a drastic act of coercion in Ireland and becoming generally one of the staunchest bastions of the Unionists. The Gladstonian Radicals, specially the Labouchere faction, turned their former near-idolisation into an envenomed hatred, but the fury of the conflict could not erase the fact that the force of Chamberlain as the foremost champion of Social Radicalism was now lost to the Liberal Party forever. British politics had been entirely overturned, and, as we shall see, the growing movement of organised labour was to have no clear-

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1. Asquith, H. H. [Lord Oxford and Asquith]: Fifty Years of Parliament, London, 1926, vol. 1, p. 168. The reference to "the Chicago Convention" underlined the support which the Nationalist Irish received from Irish groups, often terrorist, in the United States.

cut alternative between the two old parties.

Organised labour, in fact, grew rapidly between 1887 and 1892, and in London, where pressure could most effectively be applied, helped to produce a strongly Radical Liberalism. In a previous chapter we have traced the growth of Socialism and of independent labour action; it had repercussions upon even the Liberal leaders. The formation of the London County Council in 1889, following the County Councils Act passed the previous year, ushered in a vast upsurge of "municipal socialism", led by the triple force of the Fabian Society, the New Unionist forces led by Ben Tillett and John Burns, and the advanced municipal Radicalism of which J. B. Firth had been the leader and spokesman. Webb, Burns and Tillett all played active roles in London politics. Lord Rosebery was chosen as the first leader of the L.C.C., and for slightly over a year he presided over its functions, rapidly gaining the name of an advanced Radical, yet managing not to alienate the conservative group of Liberals. The impression which he gave to "the Labour party . ...that he was their man and meant to play their game"[1] was to stand him in good stead when the question of Mr. Gladstone's successor had at last to be decided. The founding of the Star and the "capture" of the Daily Chronicle, the growth of the Eight Hours movement and the social forces set in motion by the Dock Strike in 1889, meant that the social

1. J. St. Loe Strachey in the Nineteenth Century, vol. 36, October, 1894, p. 493.

problem had come prominently to the fore. It was apparent that it could not be ignored, that it was the single question which would make and break political parties, which was ultimately to break the Liberal Party as it was to make the independent Labour movement a reality.

What cognisance had official Liberalism of the new phenomena of the labour movement and the submerged sections of the populace now beginning to cry for "something" to be done? The Liberal leaders recognised the existence of these phenomena, but their actions were almost insultingly insignificant in relation to the vastness of the social problems which faced the country. Late in 1886, as we have seen, the National Liberal Federation was moved from Birmingham to London and the organisation now came under the firm control of the official party leadership; no more was it to be the bane of the parliamentarians or the vehicle of a drive to power by a Social Radical dissident. But while the party had now perforce been driven to the Left by the weight of the Whig desertion, Ostrogorski points out: "No great amount of perspicacity was required to perceive that, under these circumstances, the Federation had become a quasi-official institution, that it represented only official Liberalism, that of the regular leaders, and in no way the aspirations of the masses."[1] For the Liberal Party, by losing most of its

1. Ostrogorski, M: Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties, vol. 1, London, 1902, p. 303

Whig elements, had not purged itself of all the laissez-faire influence, which had nourished and sustained it for so long, but which could no longer pass for Radicalism. The result of the party split on what was essentially an extraneous issue was that Liberalism was now not much more homogeneous than before 1886. Many non-Radical friends of Mr. Gladstone's, like Spencer and Kimberley, remained in places of influence within the party. More important, there was still a large and important element of employers, particularly in the North, who favoured Home Rule, land reforms, perhaps even Church Disestablishment, but who opposed the transformation of the Liberal Party into a Social Radical Party. The 1886 split had helped to make social reform a greater question than every before, but it had left Liberalism in an even worse state to respond to it. Let us refer once again to Mr. Gladstone.

The Grand Old Man, already made uneasy by the evidence of the power of Social Radicalism, found himself sitting on a veritable powder keg as the 'eighties melted away. At the time of the Trafalgar Square meetings, he issued a statement which was interpreted by conservatives as favouring the rioters, but which by the demonstrators themselves was used to show the reactionary convictions of the old man. In September, 1889, in a speech at Hawarden he said that "the lesson which he drew from the London [that is, the Dock] strike was, that a large number of separate trades having little or nothing to

do with each other had shown that they intended to make common cause . . . . The competition of labour and capital was not, he considered, hostile - it was a balance of forces, and this strike had indicated some turn of the balance in favour of labour."[1] - hardly a clarion call of leadership to the embattled strikers. In 1888 John Morley had put forward a programme at Clerkenwell which Gladstone endorsed in the main at Limehouse, on December 15; he accepted the programme of "one man one vote", shorter parliaments, taxation of ground rents, leashold enfranchisement, improved artisans' dwellings, free schools and Welsh and Scottish Church disestablishment. The programme was a reversal of some of his attitudes of only two years hitherto, but even so it was not a striking manifestation of Social Radicalism. And the sincerity of the old man in proposing the programme is open to question. In February, 1890, he visited Oxford for ten days, and while there delivered himself of many High Tory utterances. For example, he said: "I view with the greatest alarm the progress of Socialism at the present day . . . . Whatever influence I possess will be used in the direction of stopping it."[2] He denounced all attempts at social "levelling", and "oblivious of the fact that he was destined shortly to declare himself in favour of the disestablishment of the Church of Wales [and that he had in fact already done so over a year before at Limehouse] he observed with great emphasis that any proposal of

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1. Annual Register, 1889, p. 193.
2. Magnus, [Sir] Philip, Gladstone, London, 1954, p. 384.

that kind would be a crime against God."[1] In 1890 he wrote with approval of contemporary society that the "basis is popular; but upon that basis is built a hierarchy of classes and of establishments savouring in part of feudal times and principles; and this, not in despite of the democratic majority, but on the whole with their assent."[2]

In 1891 he was induced to lay his blessing on the Newcastle Programme, but with a marked lack of enthusiasm. Asquith wrote that he was "indifferent to, not to say critical of, some of its items."[3] After his retirement, the Grand Old Man sent a valedictory address to his Midlothian electors, in which he said with obvious meaning: "Now is the time for the true friend of his country to remind the masses that they owe their present political elevation to no principles less broad and noble than these - the love of liberty, and of liberty for all, without distinction of class, creed, or country, and the resolute preference of the interests of the whole to any interest, be it what it may, of a narrow scope."[4]

Perhaps the most clear-cut issue upon which the Liberal leaders were forced to pronounce was the question of the Eight Hours movement, particularly in relation to miners.

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1. Ibid., p. 385.

2. Gladstone, W. E.: The Rights and Responsibilities of Labour, [pamphlet], London, 1890, p. 6.

3. Asquith, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 193.

4. Annual Register, 1894, p. 81.

While it was true that not all of the workers favoured the movement [the Durham and Northumberland miners, working under exceptionably favourable circumstances, were opposed to it], it was unquestionably a coming and powerful doctrine, which a wise leadership would have been careful early to endorse. In 1890, as we have seen, the Trades Union Congress was at last persuaded to endorse Eight Hours. Several deputations thereupon came to wait upon prominent political leaders, and Mr. Gladstone was asked for an interview on more than one occasion, a favour which he at first refused. Late in 1891, however, he wrote to a gasworker: "When I am asked to impose legal penalties upon any workman who desires and agrees to work more than eight hours per day . . . I must pause before agreeing to this affliction."[1] On June 16, 1892, before the election of that year, he consented to see a group from the London Trades Council; to the group he said: "It is fair I should say that in my opinion one of the very highest duties of all politicians under all circumstances and at all cost is to eschew and to repudiate the raising of any expectations except what they know they can fulfill. Therefore, I can say nothing more. I appeal to my life. I appeal to what I have hitherto viewed as my duty to the industrial classes, putting them in the position of standing up for their own rights, and I say what

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1. Wilkinson, William J.: Tory Democracy, New York, 1925, p. 172.

little future I have you must judge by the past."[1]

It is fair to say that the immense popularity which Mr. Gladstone had won by his age and long experience, his moral fervour and his championing of the "masses" against the "classes", was strongest among the groups of society which least understood him. The common people, the workers in shops and mines, thought of him as their leader and friend without realising that the policies which he advocated and his hostility to "constructive" reform, would hardly benefit their material condition.[2] After his departure, the realisation of the essential emptiness of the social policies of Gladstonian Liberalism was to cost the Liberal Party dear.

John Morley was, after 1886, regarded by many as the leading adviser to the Liberal chief; certainly he was a powerful and influential figure, whose ideas were not limited to the sphere of Ireland. He was, in fact, in the years before 1892 the Liberal Party's leading spokesman on labour and social questions. In 1888 and 1889 Morley made two speeches which stamped him as an advanced Social Radical, as a possible Chamberlain, in ideas if not in power or popularity. In the Clerkenwell programme, enunciated on December 12, 1888, Morley endorsed free schools, taxation of ground rents, broad powers for London government, better homes for the working

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1. Annual Register, 1892, p. 104.

2. See Appendix IV.

classes, and the politically radical programme of registration reform, "one man one vote", and shorter parliaments. The programme itself, however, was not as important as the manner in which it was enunciated. "Attack we must and attack we will," he declared. "Privilege, caste ascendancy, selfish interests - we must smite them hip and thigh."[1] The next year, at the Eighty Club, he enunciated a further series of social reforms; he supported the "free breakfast table", free school meals /though only in exceptional circumstances/, and the broad increase of activity by municipal authorities: "They ought all to have what some now have - power of acquiring the control of and administration of certain great and simple monopolies."[2] Rates should be more equally divided between owner and occupier, and factory legislation must be extended and strengthened. While saying that he did not believe in confiscation, Morley stated: "But if Socialism means a wise use of the forces of all for the good of each; if it means the legal protection of the weak against the strong; if it means the performance by public bodies of duties which individuals could not perform either so well or not at all, for themselves, why then, the principles of Socialism are admitted all over the field of our social activity."[3]

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1. Annual Register, 1888, p. 230.
2. Morley, John /Lord/: Liberalism and Social Reform /speech/ London, 1889, p. 17. The date was November 19. 1889.
3. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

Yet despite the reputation which he earned as a social reformer from these speeches, Morley was anything but a collectivist and was in fact soon to be recognised as one of the last exponents of Manchester School philosophies. Shortly before the speech at the Eighty Club, Beatrice Webb[1] wrote of him in her diary: "In his speeches he asserts that the social question is the one thing to live for . . . but yet he has evidently never thought about social questions; he does not even know the ABC of labour problems."[2] Morley believed, as a considerable portion of the Liberal Party still believed, in the gospel of "self-help"; in the same speech at the Eighty Club he denounced the Eight Hours movement, of which he was probably the most determined and effective foe in political life, and, while admitting that unemployment was a grave problem, added: "Well, I have no panacea. There are those who have panaceas. But they begin by taking society to pieces, and society, we may be quite sure, will not let itself be taken to pieces. I believe, though you may think this an imperfect answer to the enigma - I believe in firm organisation."[3] Thousands of members of the working classes were beginning to find this solution "an imperfect answer". Again in 1891 Morley denounced a statutory eight hours' law as

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1. At that time still Beatrice Potter.
2. Webb, Beatrice: <u>My Apprenticeship</u>, London, 1926, p. 306.
3. Morley, <u>Liberalism and Social Reform</u>, p. 28.

"absurd and impracticable".[1]

And yet Morley was one of the very few, perhaps the only Liberal leader to realise the existence of a social problem and to confront it squarely. Harcourt, for example, had in his own way a considerably more advanced social philosophy than Morley, but he almost never alluded to it, while Rosebery seemed, aside from his L.C.C. work, to have a positive dread of committing himself to anything. In October, 1890, Reginald Brett [later Viscount Esher] wrote in an article entitled What are the Ideals of the Masses?: "Of prominent politicians who, except Mr. John Morley, has ventured to speak freely and openly to them on the topics which fill their daily thoughts? All respect and admiration is due to him for his boldness in holding to old doctrines which are unpopular and discredited . . . . It is high time that others beside Mr. John Morley stepped into the arena."[2]

On March 24, 1892, a private member's Bill for Miners' Eight Hours came before the House. Harcourt wrote to his wife: "Today we have the eight hours for miners, a very difficult and embarrassing situation. J. Morley is bound to vote against for his Durham miners who are dead against it. I am equally bound to vote for it as all the Derbyshire miners are equally strong in its favour. Mr. G. is not to vote at

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1. Annual Register, 1891, p. 176.

2. Nineteenth Century, vol. 28, p. 532.

all. Most of the Front Bench will, I think, vote for the Bill. It is not an agreeable situation, but it will have great consequences in the future as these questions will not sleep . . . "[1] This acute observation does not reveal an overwhelming moral determination or an advanced social philosophy on the part of the writer. The Bill was defeated by 272 to 160, though a majority of Liberal members [99 against 38] voted in its favour. Morley, seriously upset, wrote to Harcourt: "I will have no part nor lot in any government that brings in eight hours bills. Other labour questions will undoubtedly follow, when the same divergence will reappear . . . . The Labour Party . . . has captured the Liberal Party."[2]

The fact was, that while the Liberal Party had lost so many of its upper and upper-middle class supporters, while the overwhelming mass of its adherents were workers, this fact was not reflected either in its leadership or in its membership in the House of Commons. Late in 1887, for example, there were 192 Liberal M.P.'s. They can be divided into four categories. First were the manual workers, Lib-Labs, of whom there were nine. Thirty-seven came from a second category, country gentlemen, retired civil service or army officers, or professional politicians living on unearned income like Gladstone and his son Herbert. A third category was of professional

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1. Gardiner, A. G.: Life of Harcourt, vol. 2, London, 1923, p. 171.

2. Ibid., p. 171.

men, of whom there were 70; 39 were lawyers of one type or another, and 18 more were journalists, authors, teachers, newspaper proprietors or writers. The final category is of business and manufacturing men, of whom there were no fewer than 76, including twenty concerned with shipping or branches thereof, fourteen with the cloth industry, five with iron, six with railways, seven with mines, and five with breweries. That is to say, fully forty per cent of Liberal M.P.'s were in the fourth category, almost as many in the third, and twenty per cent in the second. Moreover, many of them who nominally had other vocations had large incomes from landed property which augmented their incomes, as for example Labouchere. While the occupation chart shows a trend away from landowners, Liberal M.P.'s were hardly representative of the nation as a whole.[1] Fewer than five per cent of the Liberal M.P.'s had working-class backgrounds, this in a country where, as Bernard Shaw was to write a few years later, four men out of every five were wage-earners. With so few men actually representative of the classes which the Liberal Party boldly claimed to represent and protect, it is not to be wondered at that its Radicalism was safe and even spurious, avoiding the crucial questions of poverty and unemployment which could not be effectively solved short of a sweeping

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1. See Appendix VI.

change in the structure of society. Radicals, at that, were likely to be professional or landed men [like Dilke, Morley, and Labouchere]; Liberal businessmen of humble origins were often more anti-Labour than country gentlemen.[1]

Let us return to the National Liberal Federation, now the official spokesman of a safe, though much more Radical Liberalism than had existed on an "authorised" level before 1886. Moreover, the N.L.F. now aided Gladstone in the "umbrella" role. "It had been supposed," Ostrogorski writes, "that after their [i.e., the Whig] withdrawal the umbrella had been thrown into the dustheap, but evidently it still had some wear left in it. All that was done was to lengthen the handle a little, and when mended in this way it was to serve as a support and shelter to Liberals and Radicals of all shades."[2] The conservative flavour which had begun to adhere to the once-Radical N.L.F. began bitterly to be contested by outside forces of Social Radicalism. The Metropolitan Radical Federation, for example, though it was not a Socialist body, refused to join the London Liberal and Radical Union, and in fact objected strongly to the inclusion of the words "and Radical" in the title.

In the later 'eighties the party began to realise that

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1. See Appendix V.

2. Ostrogorski, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 310.

it was losing its hold on the classes it had tried to conciliate. It "held itself out as the party of the masses as opposed to the classes . . . but in reality it had not gained the affection of the people while it had alienated the middle classes."[1] Accordingly, in these years the "wire-pullers" of the N.L.F. began to devise a more Radical programme, year by year, until the climax was reached in November, 1891, by the adoption of the celebrated Newcastle Programme.[2]

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1. Ibid., p. 314.

2. Edward Pease wrote in The History of the Fabian Society that the influence of Sidney Webb's Wanted, a Programme: an Appeal to the Liberal Party, privately printed in 1888, had been great, and that, largely through the Star and the Daily Chronicle, "everything was done, which skilful agitators knew, to make a popular demand for a social reform programme . . . . The result - how largely attributable to our efforts can hardly now be estimated - was the Newcastle Programme." [Pease, op. cit., p. 111.] He appends a note by Bernard Shaw, which read in part: "The exact facts of the launching of the Newcastle Programme are these. Webb gave me the Programme in his own handwriting, as a string of resolutions. I, being then a permeative Fabian on the executive of the South St. Pancras Liberal and Radical Association . . . took them down to a meeting in Percy Hall . . . where the late Mr. Beale, then Liberal candidate . . . was addressing a public meeting. There were certainly not 20 present, perhaps not 10. He said they looked complicated, and that if I would move them he would second them . . . . Passed unanimously. That night they went down to the Star with a report of an admirable speech which Mr. Beale was supposed to have delivered. Next day he found the National Liberal Club in an uproar at his revolutionary break-away. But he played up; buttoned his coat determinedly; said we lived in progressive times and must move with them; and carried it off." [Ibid., p. 112n.]

Its contents may briefly be summarised here. First, last and always came Home Rule. Second was Welsh Church Disestablishment, that which Mr. Gladstone had thought so recently to be a "crime against God". Third, the L.C.C. and other local authorities were to have "full municipal powers", which included the power to control their own supplies of gas, water, markets, and police, powers of taxation and, generally, sufficient authority to launch a full-scale programme of "municipal socialism". Fourth, free education with public control, more effective than the Act just passed by the Unionist Government. Fifth, registration reform to reduce the voting qualifying period to three months, "one man one vote", three-year Parliaments, payment of returning officers' expenses, and something vague about paying "expenses of members", a half-answer to the demand for Payment of Members which was so strong a point in the Labour programme. Sixth, District and Parish Councils were to be brought into existence and to have full powers to buy up land compulsorily and to redistribute it in small quantities for allotments, recreation, and many other uses, public and private - in other words, something rather better than the full "three acres and a cow" programme of Chamberlain, which Gladstone had rejected in 1885. Seventh and last was the "omnibus" resolution, a broad programme including repeal of Primogenture and Entail, free sale and transfer of leases, taxation of land values and ground rents, compensation for disturbances and for improvements, leasehold enfranchisement,

popular Local Veto of the liquor trade, Scottish Church Disestablishment, equalisation of death duties on real and personal property, just division of rates between owner and occupier, employers' liability, taxation of mining royalites, the "Free Breakfast Table" /food taxes still brought in almost £5 million annually/, extension of the Factory Acts, Mending or Ending of the House of Lords, and the better housing of the working classes.[1]

The Newcastle Programme was remarkable for the number and variety of its proposals. It was equally notable, however, for the paucity of its social legislation. At a time when Eight Hours and Payment of Members were the crucial questions, the programme had evaded both issues. It was not representative of what the working classes desired, nor even of the sentiment of many of the common run of Liberals. It was not nearly so advanced as the new programme of the T.U.C., put forward at Liverpool the year before. Labouchere complained in his journal, Truth, /January 2, 1890/ that the N.L.F. had become a clique: "A programme is submitted . . . but by whom the programme is framed is shrouded in mystery. The delegates were asked to accept or reject it. All amendments and all additional 'planks' wereruled out of order."[2] "In 1891," Ostrogorski writes, "the authorities of the Caucus would not

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1. The above information is taken from W. T. Stead's pamphlet On the Eve, London, 1892.

2. Ostrogorski, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 303-4.

allow a discussion or a division on the 'eight hours' question . . . . They alleged that from information in their possession [which they kept to themselves] only a few local associations were in favour of the 'eight hours'."[1] Meanwhile, while the Newcastle Programme was limiting the Liberal Party to a safe and familiar social programme, such as Factory Acts, Employers' Liability, and better housing, while its other projected measures were more intent upon reducing the privileges of landowners and removing political inequalities, time was not standing still. Joseph Chamberlain was campaigning throughout the country with a popular programme of miners' eight hours, payment of members, voluntary old age pensions and other reforms, aided by several of the "Tory Democrats" of the old Fourth Party. Nor, as we shall see, was the record of the Unionist Government a negligible one by 1892. But Morley, so often the Liberal spokesman on social questions, could not commit himself; to his Newcastle electors on February 6, 1892, the former Irish Secretary said that "whether or not the operation of the Poor Law could be made more elastic in this particular field [old age] was a matter for serious inquiry. Mr. Morley was of opinion that, before coming to any conclusion, it would be necessary to send competent commissioners to examine the condition of old-age poverty and old-age relief

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1. Ibid., p. 305.

in the various typical centres of the country."[1] It will be remembered that the second and third volumes of Charles Booth's great survey had been published in 1891 and that in them thirty per cent of Londoners had been declared to be living at or beneath the "poverty line". It will further be remembered that Booth's remedy was the provision by the state of universal, non-contributory old-age pensions. Yet Morley could state in February, 1892, that it was a matter for "serious inquiry"! It was the same Morley who, on August 3, 1891, had said that "a good deal had been said about insurance for old age, but a solution of this question . . . could not be arrived at without making a contribution compulsory, and making the State the guarantor of friendly societies. But a reform which would probably be worth all other social reforms together would be an improvement of the habits of the people in respect to temperance."[2]

One great issue which the Liberal Party could have done much about was the question of labour representation in Parliament. We have seen that this was one of the principal causes of the desertion of Liberalism by working-class leaders after 1885, notably in the cases of Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, and also that a party which claimed to sustain and be sustained by "the masses" had a Labour representation of

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1. <u>Annual Register</u>, 1892, p. 14.

2. <u>Annual Register</u>, 1891, p. 164.

under five per cent in its parliamentary ranks. In 1891, for example, in his Newcastle speech Gladstone said: "There ought to be a great effort of the Liberal Party to extend their Labour representation in Parliament. That representation has . . . done immense good . . . . Let us give scope and room enough to choose a few more men, who, I doubt not, will be of the same kind. I say a few - I hope they will not be a very few, but a good many, and I believe that that sentiment is a sentiment that the whole Liberal Party entertains."[1] Also at Newcastle, speaking two and a half years later, John Morley said: "I do not believe, until you get the voice of labour more effectively heard in the House of Commons - the voice of men who know where the shoe pinches, who know what their needs are - I do not believe that House of Commons will be what it ought to be - the true mirror of the nation."[2] Whether Morley quite literally meant that the House of Commons should contain between 500 and 550 working-men is highly doubtful; his "mirror" would more likely reflect an accurate image if 50 "Lib-Labs" had existed amongst 350 or more Liberal M.P.'s.

The sweet words of the party leadership, however, meant little in practice, nor did they encourage working-class leaders to remain Liberals. In 1888 at the N.L.F. Conference at Birmingham, the Committee Report urged: "It is of the

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1. Christie, O.F.: The Transition to Democracy, London, 1934, p. 277.

2. Morley, John: The Liberal Programme [Speech, 21 August, 1894], London, p. 17.

highest importance that the officers of Liberal Associations should take care to make their Associations so thoroughly representative as to give no ground for . . . complaint . . . . Those making the demand should be treated with the utmost frankness, generosity, and courtesy."[1] In 1890, however the dissident Metropolitan Radical Federation again raised the issue, asking for the retirement before the next General Election of fifty Liberal candidates so that fifty seats could go to the representatives of Labour. Spence Watson, then and for many years thereafter President of the N.L.F., wrote that the hands of the national organisation were tied, for it could only suggest, not compel. While professing the greatest sympathy for labour representation, however, he continued, revealingly: "Possibly most Liberals who are working men will agree that, other things being equal, and Labour being insufficiently represented, the fact that a candidate is a working man should give him the preference over one who is not; but the country is to be considered before any class of its citizens, however large and important, and the preference should only go where other things are equal."[2] Asquith, one of the Liberal Cabinet's leading Radicals, went to Huddersfield to speak in April, 1894, where fourteen months earlier a Tory had won the then Liberal seat in a by-election.

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1. Watson, R. S.: The National Liberal Federation, London, 1907, p. 88.

2. Ibid., p. 126.

He deplored this fact: "Thereupon someone in the audience cried out: 'Try a Labour Man,' to which Mr. Asquith anwered that he objected to 'government by groups'."[1] Again, at Hull, on January 22, 1895, the then Home Secretary urged labour to remain with the Liberal Party as it "looked to the interests of the community from the point of view of the community as a whole . . . . Far better, believe me, try to influence a party like the Liberal Party, which is in sympathy with your aims, which breathes your spirit, and which has no selfish or class interest to serve."[2] It was this insistence that the interests of labour were "class" interests while those of the upper classes were of the "community as a whole" which so incensed many working-class leaders. When he became Prime Minister Lord Rosebery manifested the greatest concern with social questions, at least in his speeches, but evinced little concern for working-class representation; speaking at Manchester on May 2, 1894, he said: "I am quite aware that Liberal associations in many districts are by no means so representative of the Liberalism of the districts as they should be; but that is a matter which the Labour party can remedy for themselves. They can easily obtain in the Liberal Associations such control as is their just due."[3]

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1. Annual Register, 1894, p. 89.
2. Annual Register , 1895, pp. 9-10.
3. Annual Register, 1894, pp. 106-7.

This rather unrealistic suggestion made by a peer with little knowledge of constituency conditions was perhaps made in reply to an article in the Nineteenth Century written the previous February by T. R. Threlfall, Secretary of the Labour Electoral Association. Threlfall, a firm believer in co-operation with Liberalism, wrote bitterly of the selection caucuses which chose candidates: "There may be a dozen, perhaps twenty, or even fifty, present, and these invariably belong either to the shopkeeping or small employing class . . . . The executive council is mainly composed of the same class of people, and when the chairman and officers are selected, they are in the great majority of cases big local employers, leading lawyers, or landowners. When a candidate is chosen these people are of course upon the selecting committee, and they take care that the budding Parliamentarian shall be 'a man of means' or a 'person of position'. Should the chances of winning the seat be regarded as hopeless, then a Labour candidate may be adopted; but even then it is in a hesitating manner which shows the task is not a very agreeable one."[1] Of the thirteen Labour members then in Parliament, Threlfall went on, four had defied the caucus, five were miners' candidates in overwhelmingly mining areas, and only four "either captured the caucus or out-generalled it."[2]

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1. Nineteenth Century, vol. 35, February 1894, p. 214.
2. Ibid., p. 214.

working-class people distrusted and disliked the caucus: ". . . As it exists today it is too narrow and too much hampered with class prejudice to be a reflex of the expanding democratic and labour sentiment."[1] Threlfall's reluctant conclusion was that Labour must learn to be more independent of the Liberal Party, and in fact the L.E.A.'s failure to secure Liberal co-operation [Payment of Members was another L.E.A. cause which the Liberals refused to take up] resulted in its demise in 1896.

Other working-class leaders and writers were more militant than Threlfall. Writing in August, 1894, Clem Edwards said: ". . . The demand for labour representation has become general, real, and earnest. The whole trades union movement has definitely declared in its favour. Many of the unions have done more than this. They have expressed their willingness to 'pay the piper'. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, with a membership of 71,000, have resolved to raise a Parliamentary fund, and already, by means of a single threepenny levy, have provided a fund of £800. The National Society of Boot and Shoe operatives, with 30,000 members, have voted to maintain one member. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, with a similar membership, have done likewise. The National Union of Teachers have established a fund for promoting the candidatures of two of their members.

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1. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 214 - and see Appendix V.

The Amalgamated Society of Tailors have decided to maintain one of their members. The Tyneside and National Labourers' Union have adopted a similar resolution. Most significant of all, perhaps, the cotton operatives, with their vast localised vote in Lancashire, have issued a circular to take a ballot on the question. And no one who knows the quiet revolution which has taken place in Lancashire working-class opinion can for a moment doubt the issue . . . . The Dockers' union have given special facilities to their officials to stand for Parliament . . . . These declarations and decisions, be it understood, are quite apart from what may be done by the Independent Labour Party . . . . The gravity of this development . . . can scarcely be exaggerated. It is so dangerous to Liberalism that if it is not swamped in many of the industrial constituencies, the Liberal Party will have to do much more than prate its pretty platitudes about the desirability of labour representation."[1]

The Liberal Party leaders, however, either said with Rosebery that labour should act within the local caucuses for itself or that they could not control the constituencies; thus, replying to the dissident Metropolitan Radical Federation in 1891, Schnadhorst said that local associations could not be forced; headquarters could only "earnestly bespeak for him [i.e. the working-man] the generous support of the Liberal

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1. Contemporary Review, vol. 56, August, 1894, pp. 276-7.

Associations."[1] Herbert Gladstone, writing in 1892, said the same thing, and admitted: "The long and short of it is that the constituencies, for social, financial, and trade reasons, are extremely slow to adopt Labour candidates."[2]

Protestations of this type were not satisfying to working-class militants; citing the Liberal Westminster Gazette in his support, Edwards said: "It is not enough for Lord Rosebery to speak in moving terms of eloquence of the new spirit and fresh forces at work, and then to do nothing to give it representation. His retort may be that he is fully alive to the need, that his Cabinet colleagues are favourable, and that Parliament Street [Liberal headquarters] is yearningly anxious to secure the clear running of labour candidates, but that they cannot interfere in the local choice by dictating from headquarters. This is very well in theory. But in practice a great deal can be done. The supply of 'undesirable' candidates can be withheld from Parliament Street, and effective pressure can easily be put on if there is a real desire to help Labour representation."[3] As the situation existed at

1. Pelling, H: Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900, London, 1954, p. 237.
2. Ibid., p. 237.
3. Contemporary Review, vol. 56, p. 277. The citation from the Westminster Gazette [May 2, 1894] read in part: "The situation at the present moment is this: everybody on the Liberal side is favourable to labour candidates in general, but when it comes to any particular case, everybody alleges that somebody else is unfavourable. The M.P. if tackled on the subject says: 'I should be delighted to make way for the labour man, or to stand with him [as the case may be]; but my local chairman of committee won't hear of it.' The local

this time, too many election contests resembled a by-election at the Hartlepools in January, 1891, of which the Annual Register wrote: "The candidates were fairly matched, both being large employers of labour and both being deservedly popular. On labour questions there was little divergence of view."[1]

Again, as in the case of Eight Hours, the Liberal leadership should have had the foresight to make provision for a rising Labour demand. Not only individual unions agitated for labour representation; in 1890, it will be recalled, the T. U. C. had endorsed a collectivist programme; in 1891 it not only called for Labour candidates, but said they should be "independent of party politics." In 1892 the Parliamentary Committee was instructed to go deeply into the problem, particularly in relation to financial difficulties. In 1893, the T.U.C. at last endorsed a socialist policy, and at the same time accepted the idea of a separate fund for independent labour members, to which each Union was asked to contribute five shillings for every hundred members. While these motions meant more on paper than in practice, they were significant of trade union thinking, and by the end of the century would

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chairman says: 'We of the committee should be delighted to accept the labour man; but the fact is that the middle-class electors won't have him.' The middle-class elector says: 'We don't object to the labour man at all; but the truth is that the working-classes do not care to be represented by one of their own class, and least of all by this particular candidate.' . . . Undoubtedly the main difficulty in the matter is a local difficulty. . . . There is only one way . . . . In selected constituencies, where, after due consideration, labour candidates seem desirable, the Liberal leaders should intervene . . ." /Ibid., p. 278./

1. Annual Register, 1891, p. 14.

take definite form.

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The Irish question was kept before the public by the determined efforts of the Liberal Party, and those efforts were sustained very largely by two men, Gladstone and Morley. Immediately after the lost election of 1886 the Liberals had drawn into close harmony with the Irish; men whom they had denounced as conspirators and traitors were lionised at Liberal functions and became firm allies. The process of alliance was all the more augmented by the drastic measure of permanent "coercion" which A. J. Balfour, now Irish Secretary and Leader of the House, introduced in March, 1887. This bill and the equally drastic one to force it through the House of Commons by a process of strict closure were fought bitterly by the Liberals and Irish, while for their part the Unionists received tremendous aid from a series of articles in the <u>Times</u>, beginning in March, called <u>Parnellism and Crime</u>, which attempted to prove that Parnell personally and the Irish Nationalists generally had been responsible for the agrarian terrorism which had been sporadically so intense in Ireland since 1880, most markedly in 1881 and 1882. On the 18th of April the second reading of the Coercion Bill took place in the House of Commons; on the same day the <u>Times</u> created a tremendous, [and as it seemed to many Liberals] catastrophic furor with a letter purporting to be from Parnell to "a violent friend", written on May 15, 1882, about the Phoenix Park

murders which had recently taken place. The letter read as follows: "Dear Sir - I am not surprised at your friend's anger, but he and you should know that to denounce the murders was the only course open to us. To do that promptly was plainly our best policy. But you can tell him and all the others concerned, that though I regret the accident of Lord F. Cavendish's death, I cannot refuse to admit that Burke got no more than his deserts. You are at liberty to show him this, and others whom you can trust also, but let not my address be known. He can write to House of Commons. - Yours very truly, Chas. S. Parnell."[1]

The uproar caused by this letter and subsequent similar ones was utilised by the Government to maximum advantage. Unionists acted as if the unproved charges of the Times were completely true, and regarded Parnell's immediate denunciation of it as "a villainous and barefaced forgery"[2] as an outright lie. The situation appeared black both for the Irish leader and his Liberal allies, as the Coercion Act became law and the Times articles continued to spread calumny about Parnell and the Irish Nationalist cause. Events in Ireland did not help greatly. The "Plan of Campaign", launched in Ireland late in 1886, was an attempt by the poverty-stricken tenants to lower rents by a form of collective bargaining, but though

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1. Morley, Gladstone, vol. 3, p. 391n.

2. McCarthy, Justin: A History of Our Own Times, Vol. 5, London, 1897, p. 254.

it was almost unequivocally endorsed by Liberals and accepted in part by many Irish landlords, Parnell tried to moderate it and the Unionists denounced it as another resort to terrorism. Nor did the Mitchelstown affair, taking place in September, 1887, succeed in erasing the air of crime and assassination which overhung the Irish cause. At a meeting at Mitchelstown, held to protest at the prosecution of William O'Brien and attended by 8,000 persons, a scuffle with the police broke out, and three men were shot. Feeling ran high among the Irish and Liberals, and Gladstone's advice to "Remember Mitchelstown" was long followed. Balfour's declaration that "the police were in no way to blame, and that no responsibility rested upon anyone except those who convened the meeting"[1] was another propaganda point for the Home Rulers. But even this affair, which was not without its ridiculous aftermath, could not overcome the double disadvantage of apathy among the greater part of the British populace to Ireland's sufferings and the condemnation, still unproven but not proven false, of Parnell and his followers as murderers.

Finally, however, the affair came to a climax. Parnell refused to prosecute the Times, for he felt he could hardly obtain justice from a Middlesex jury, while to try the case in Ireland would be entirely unconvincing in Great Britain.

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1. Eyck, Erich: Gladstone, London, 1938, p. 410.

In August, 1888, however, fully sixteen months after the publication of the purported Parnell letter, F. H. O'Donnell, a slightly quixotic follower of Parnell, sued the Times for libel. His case was dismissed, for it was ruled that nothing that had appeared in the paper had incriminated O'Donnell. The counsel for the Times, however, Sir Richard Webster, who was also Attorney General at the time, brought up all the charges which the Times had printed earlier, once more bringing the unproven assertions and the question of Parnell's guilt or innocence to the fore. Now the Irish leader was forced to act, and with Liberal aid asked for a Select Committee of the House to consider the charges. In an unprecedented action, however, the Government refused the request, and against strong opposition established a commission of three judges, Hannen, Day, and Smith, all of them resolute and known Unionists, to try the case. "It was," Morley said, "a strange and fantastic scene. Three judges were trying a political and social revolution."[1] The Commission first sat in October, 1888, and met for over a year, while 98,000 questions were asked and an 8,000 page record gradually accumulated.

The details of what amounted to a trial of both the Irish Nationalists and the Liberal Party need not detain us

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1. Morley, Gladstone, vol. 3, p. 401.

here. For the first few months Sir Richard Webster repeated the charges already made at the O'Donnell trial, while the Conservatives, enjoying their moment of glory, assumed the complete verity of the charges. So, for that matter, did the Liberal Unionists, led by the bitterly hated Chamberlain. Finally in February 1889, a disreputable Irish journalist, one Richard Pigott, was brought to the stand and under skilful questioning by Sir Charles Webster, aided by H. H. Asquith [then a young barrister and M.P. since 1886], broke down completely. A signed confession of forgery was obtained and Pigott fled to Madrid, there to commit suicide [on March 1] while in refuge from the law. Although the hearings continued for another several months, and although the report of the three judges was not made public for another year, as far as the general public was concerned the case was closed. Parnell had been vindicated, he was lionised all over Great Britain and never had the cause of Home Rule and its Liberal and Nationalist adherents been so popular in the country. The Times and its Governmental allies were deeply discredited, even with as important a supporter as Lord Randolph Churchill, who bitterly condemned the Government's actions in the whole affair.

The Times, in fact, was made to look extremely unscrupulous lous; the loss of a quarter of a million pounds which it had suffered from the affair was less severe than the public opprobrium which now faced it. The Pall Mall Gazette wrote;

"The Times is a newspaper, its office the place where, of all others, information is most accessible, but the conductors of the leading journal in the world had no means of investigating the all-important question of the reputation of their solitary witness, although a telegram to their correspondent in Dublin would have brought them a scathing record of the rascal's career in less than twenty-four hours."[1] To this indictment may be added a curious anecdote from the pen of a leading Unionist historian, written many years later. In September, 1888, Sir J. A. R. Marriott writes: "I was dining with a friend in Dublin, who asked me my position about the 'Parnell Letters'. I replied, rather carelessly, 'I suppose Parnell wrote them.' 'He did not,' retorted my host, and I will tell you who did - Richard Pigott.' It was in September, 1888, a month before the Commission began its hearings, and five months before Pigott was put into the box that a casual visitor to Dublin learned [in confidence] the name of the forger of the famous letter."[2]

Thus in 1889 the Liberal forces seemed to be nearing triumph. The Government was reeling before harsh condemnation and never had the Irish cause seemed so happy a one for the Liberals. By-elections were showing steady victories for the

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1. Pall Mall Gazette, Extra No. 46, Pigottism and the 'Times', London, March 6, 1889, p. 11.

2. Marriott, [Sir] J.A.R.: Modern England, 1885-1932, London, 1934, p. 53n.

Opposition, so that by the end of the year they had gained a net total of eleven seats from the Government. At that rate a Liberal majority of at least a hundred seemed certain when the Government dared to test public opinion. In 1890 the trend continued; a Government majority of 117 at the General Election of 1886 had by defeats and defections shrunk at year's end to 79. One of the new Liberals to enter Parliament in an 1890 by-election victory was David Lloyd George. But then at last the storm broke, broke in redoubled fury after the victory Parnell had enjoyed in 1889. Parnell had been, his biographer writes, "standing on a mine, and while the air still rang with the rejoicing which had hailed his latest triumph, his doom was sealed."[1] The cause which sealed the doom was the divorce case which Captain O'Shea had brought against his wife earlier in the year, in which Parnell had been named as co-respondent. The liaison between the Irish leader and Mrs. O'Shea was, of course, well known to the inner circle of the political world; indeed, there is more than a little evidence to show that it was Chamberlain who stood behind O'Shea and who had urged him to bring the suit. Gladstone had written while the trial was proceeding: "I fear a thundercloud is about to burst over Parnell's head, and I suppose it will end the career of a man in many respects invaluable."[2] On November 17, 1890, a degree _nisi_ was issued,

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1. O'Brien, R. Barry: _Life of Parnell_, vol 2., London, 1899, pp. 235-6.
2. Morley, _Gladstone_, vol. 3, p. 429.

awarding a divorce to O'Shea and damning Parnell as the blackest of deceivers and cowards. The evidence at the trial was far more unfavourable to Parnell than was in fact justified by the actual situation, but it was badly bungled on his side by a series of misunderstandings and indiscretions.

The divorce rocked the political world like a sudden and violent storm. To Morley it seemed that "a tremendous squall burst over the flowing tide."[1] The same reaction was felt by other Liberal leaders, and to make matters worse the annual conference of the National Liberal Federation met at Sheffield a few days later [at this Conference Morley wrote, significantly, that he "pleased them best by high-stepping nonsense of a high Socialist flavour."[2]]. There tremendous pressure was put on the representatives of the Liberal chief, Morley and Harcourt, to impress upon the Grand Old Man the assertion that the Liberal cause could not continue while Parnell held the Irish leadership. It was a difficult situation. Unlike the forged letters, the long years of adultery could be and had been proven, and the strong Nonconformist element in the Liberal Party protested vehemently. How, it was asked, could Liberalism lead a popular movement based on a highly moral claim, when a man in Parnell's position was a proven adulterer? On the other hand, adultery was a common enough

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1. Morley, Recollections, London, 1917, vol. 1, p. 250.
2. Ibid., p. 257.

offence, shared by more than one of the leading statesmen of the day, an offence "which has been condoned by the English in some of their most illustrious kings, statesmen, soldiers, and sailors."[1] It seemed that the sin had not been the actual liaison with Mrs. O'Shea, but being found out.

Be that as it may, the pressure came quickly. On November 19 W. T. Stead, one of the leading journalists of the day and a Nonconformist, wrote privately to Gladstone to denounce Parnell, a denunciation which he followed by public manifestations. On the 23rd Hugh Price Huges, the eminent Methodist preacher, denounced Parnell from the pulpit and on the same day Schnadhorst wrote from Sheffield to say that one Liberal candidate had "bolted" already and more were likely to follow. Harcourt wrote from Sheffield on the 22nd: "I have to report to you that the opinion was <u>absolutely unanimous and extremely strong</u> that if Parnell is allowed to remain as the leader of the Irish Party all further co-operation between them and the English Liberals must be at an end."[2] Campbell-Bannerman, two days before, had written to Harcourt: "To the best of my observation and information, the feeling among our people in Scotland is very strong against Parnell remaining as the recognised head of his party."[3] Gladstone

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1. Holland, Bernard: <u>Life of Devonshire</u>, vol. 2, London, 1911, p. 216. The eminent men of the day who kept mistresses included Hartington, among others.
2. Gardiner, <u>op. cit.</u> vol. 2, p. 83.
3. Spender, J. A.: <u>Life of Campbell-Bannerman</u>, vol. 1, London, 1923, p. 121.

had already come to the conclusion that "it'll na dee," and upon Morley's return from Sheffield they together wrote a letter, to be used only if necessary, to tell the world that while the Liberal chief could make no moral denunciation of Parnell [he was emphatic upon this point] the political results of the divorce would make it necessary for the Irish leader to resign, at least temporarily. The letter, cast in the form of a communication from Gladstone to Morley, said: " . . . Notwithstanding the spendid services rendered by Mr. Parnell to his country, his continuance at the present moment in the leadership would be productive of consequences disastrous in the highest degree to the cause of Ireland . . . . The continuance I speak of would not only place many hearty and effective friends of the Irish cause in a position of great embarrassment, but would render my retention of the leadership of the Liberal Party, based as it has been mainly upon the prosecution of the Irish cause, almost a nullity."[1]

Meanwhile, Parnell had been vehemently and stoutly supported by his followers, both in Ireland and by a travelling group of Nationalist M.P.'s in the United States. A meeting of the Irish party was scheduled for the House of Commons on November 25, and Morley entrusted Justin McCarthy with the contents of the Gladstone letter to communicate to Parnell. The latter, however, carefully eluded McCarthy, and his

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1. Morley, Gladstone, vol. 3, p. 437.

followers, not knowing the Liberal chief's mind, unanimously re-elected him as leader. The blow to the Liberals was severe. Gladstone wrote in his diary the next day: "For every day, I may say, of these five years, we have been laboriously rolling up hill the stone of Sisyphus. Mr. Parnell's decision of yesterday means that the stone is to break away from us and roll down again to the bottom of the hill."[1] What a blow indeed for a leader now almost 81 years old! It was felt that no recourse was left but to publish the letter to Morley, and this was immediately done. It changed the whole tenor of political life. Parnell now had his back to the wall, and for the first fortnight of December fought his case with the Irish party in the House of Commons, in the famous Committee Room No. 15. The upshot was that he was deposed by a vote of 44 to 29, and the Irish divided into two irreconciliable factions, not to be re-united until the end of the century.

Parnell himself went almost mad. On November 27 he issued a statement to the Irish people, begging them not to throw him to "the English wolves now howling for my destruction."[2] He denounced Gladstone as a "grand old spider" and accused him and Morley of being prepared to weaken or abandon the next Home Rule Bill. He returned to Ireland after his

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1. Garratt, G. T.: The Two Mr. Gladstones, London, 1936, p. 294.

2. O'Brien, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 258.

defeat at Westminster by the Irish party and campaigned furiously throughout the country, fighting by-election after by-election in the teeth of the hostility of the Roman Catholic Church and much secular Irish opinion. North Sligo, Carlow, Kilkenny - at all of these places the deposed leader suffered defeat in 1891, and at last, worn out by the terrible struggle he had been through, Parnell died at the age of forty-six on October 6, 1891. The Liberals suffered heavily as well; soon after the publication of the letter to Morley a loss was sustained at a by-election at Bassetlaw which the Gladstonians had hoped to win, and while they did win several other by-elections, the moral fervour and unity which had been so noticeable until November, 1890, had gone. Gladstone blamed the split for the small majority which the Liberals won in 1892, and years later, telling O'Brien that "Parnell was the most remarkable man I ever met,"[1] he added: "I do believe firmly that if these divorce proceedings had not taken place there would be a Parliament in Ireland today."[2]

The relations of Liberalism to the Irish cause, which had suffered such ups and downs in the four years following 1886, suffered not only from the external events which affected the Irish party. There was also much evidence that internally the Liberal Party was deeply divided. Many of the rank and file

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1. Ibid., p. 357. [This interview was in 1897.]

2. Ibid., pp. 357-8.

did not share Gladstone and Morley's enthusiasm for Home Rule, many objected to the obsolete social beliefs of the leadership, and many resented their leader's repeated assertion that until Home Rule had been passed they must expect the postponement of domestic reform. Gladstone said that "social reform was like a walled garden of fruit; which would be entered only when the Irish Question was satisfactorily settled."[1] In August, 1889, to take one instance, there appeared an article in the Nineteenth Century by Atherley Jones, a Radical M.P., who manifested extreme concern with the exclusive emphasis of the official leadership on Ireland. Not only was Liberalism now almost exclusively dependent upon the support of the working classes, but most of the leaders had failed to realise that fact. "With one or two exceptions the titular leaders of the Liberal Party are the survivors of an order of things that has ceased to be - in other words, there is no radical distinction between the policy of Conservatism and that of official Liberalism . . . . So long, indeed, as Mr. Gladstone remains, his authority will be generally respected by the extreme section; but it is no secret that when he ceases to be leader there will be a distinct demand by the Radical party for a share in the party management and the control of the party policy. It is felt, and has been more or less formally expressed, that the present front bench is

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1. Armytage, W. H. G.: A. J. Mundella, London, 1951, p. 280.

conspicuously out of touch with the new Liberalism, and that the apostolic succession to office of hereditary claimants and personal favourites has long since been a political anachronism." Then, the crux: "Thoughtful Liberals are day by day becoming more impressed with the uncomfortable reflecttion that the masses are not moved by - in fact are wonderfully indifferent to, the woes of Ireland."[1]

Several years later a young Liberal wrote: "If we are to look at the Ministry of 1886 from the point of view of 1897, we shall have to confess that the country was in face of a question yet more absorbing than Ireland . . . . From 1886 onwards the Labour Question forced itself to the front, and it is now the great question of the day . . . . It is to the relation of classes and to the distribution of wealth that men now turn their eyes." The great issue had been the Dock Strike in 1889. "From that moment the working classes and the distribution of wealth claimed the first place in men's notice. The cry grew steadily, 'We have had enough of Ireland; for Heaven's sake, let us look nearer home.' Thus Ireland lost its position of absorbing importance . . ."[2]

More and more the cry from ordinary Liberal Party workers was raised against the official leadership and for a bolder domestic policy, as Morley and others found from their annual speeches at the Conferences of the National Liberal Federation.

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1. <u>Nineteenth Century</u>, vol. 26, August, 1889, p. 189. Also see Appendix IV.

2. <u>Essays in Liberalism</u> by Six Oxford Men, London, 1897, p. 261, p. 263 - written by P. J. MacDonnell.

Not only, however, were the humbler elements of the party tired of Ireland; it was well known that Lord Rosebery was cool to Home Rule, and that Harcourt felt the same. He and Morley carried on a heated correspondence over the question of what action next to pursue after the O'Shea divorce case had exploded into the political world. Harcourt wrote late in December: "In my opinion Parnell for the time at least having fatally checked our positive advance in the direction of Home Rule, we should operate on the negative and defensive lines as against coercion."[1] Morley angrily rejected this counsel, and wrote unhappily on January 7, 1891: "The crash to me is worse than to you. I believed in this policy . . . . It has all gone to pieces under the most ignoble circumstances. . . "[2]

By the time of the General Election, therefore, the position of the Liberal Party in relation to Ireland was a decidedly unfortunate one. The Irish leader was dead, his followers divided, the cause tarnished, while at home the party rank and file were clamouring for a bold social policy at the expense of Home Rule. The wishes of the leaders and of their adherents were becoming dangerously opposed to each other.

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Meanwhile, who were the Liberal exponents of the

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 92.

2. Ibid., p. 93.

collectivist groundswell which gained so much strength during the tenure of the Unionist Government? Who were the Parliamentary spokesmen of Social Radicalism now that "Joe" had turned "Judas", the most hated of the hated? There were two groups who attempted to fill the gap. First there were the remnants of the Chamberlain forces, led by Henry Labouchere and concentrating on mainly political objectives. "Labby", surrounded by a growing band of adherents, formed in 1889 what the Annual Register of that year called "a new party . . . duly equipped with 'whips' and other emblems of distinct organisation . . ."[1] The group was the most hard-working and vehement of all the Liberal sections in its onslaughts against the Government, specially on questions affecting political and social equality. For example, the Labouchere Radicals condemned the Government's action in closing Trafalgar Square to demonstrators in 1888 and forced a division on the issue. In 1889 they moved for leasehold enfranchisement [May 1, defeated 186-157], to abolish university representation [May 10, defeated 317-126], for disestablishment of the Welsh Church [May 14, defeated 284-231], and to abolish the House of Lords veto [May 17, defeated 201-160]. They also continually protested against the size of Royal Grants, a vexed issue in this Parliament, and on more than one occasion carried the bulk of the party with them

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1. Annual Register, 1889, p. 79.

against Gladstone. The group had disbanded as an official organisation by mid-1891, but Labouchere retained much influence with Liberal members. Despite his group's emphasis on political questions, it was unquestionably not typical of the old school Radicalism characterised by John Bright and Auberon Herbert. Labouchere was a firm believer in state action and in the 'nineties was on record as favouring the state acquisition of the railways. In a debate with H. M. Hyndman in 1894 he stated: "Modern Radicalism is in favour of both Collectivism and Individualism."[1] But the emphasis on Collectivism was very faint by standards even of that day. Until the advent of the Liberal Government in 1892, "Labby" was a foe even of eight hours. And as late as 1894 he could ask rhetorically: "Why is the Anglo-Saxon race the master race in the world? Why has the Anglo-Saxon race maintained its liberties?"[2] And then reply: "It is because of that individualism, that self-reliance, which exists in this country."[3]

The Labouchere Radicals were strong Little Englanders; they detested the growing sentiments of Jingoism which were becoming strong in the late eighties. The Imperial Conference at the time of the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and the Kipling Imperialist craze, which began after the publication

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1. Hyndman, H. M., and Labouchere, Henry: Debate on Socialism, London, 1894, p. 12.

2. Ibid., p. 23.

3. Ibid., p. 23.

in 1890 of Plain Tales from the Hills, left them untouched. Labouchere himself had been at one with Morley and Harcourt in the days of the 1880-1885 Liberal Government on imperial questions, and he was to continue so, an association of some importance.

The other Radical group which was noticeable between 1887 and 1892 was an entirely new one, and an interesting phenomenon in that it contained several of the leaders of the Liberal Party of twenty years hence. It was largely due to their ability to align themselves with the forces of Collectivism and Imperialism which ensured this result. The group was composed largely of young men, mainly lawyers or aristocrats who mingled in fashionable society; they were elected first in 1885 and 1886 and were consciously seeking a "new Liberalism", which could embrace and sustain the coming trends of the times. It included H. H. Asquith, A. H. D. Acland, Sir Edward Grey, R. B. Haldane, Tom Ellis, Sydney Buxton, and two or three others, the six named here including a future Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, three other Cabinet Ministers, and a Chief Whip. In domestic politics they embraced Social Radicalism, though in various ways. "We were distrustful of Mr. Gladstone's absorption in Home Rule and anxious for a strong Liberal Government which should be radical in Home Affairs."[1] This is Grey speaking.

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1. Trevelyan, G. M.: Grey of Fallodon, London, 1932, p. 34.

"Mr. Gladstone was magnificent over Home Rule. But he was not, old as he had become, really interested in the new ideas of social reform which were beginning to stir us younger ones. Nor did any of the other Liberal leaders excepting Morley understand why we were discontented."[1] Thus Haldane. Asquith wrote that the group "sat, and more or less acted, together in what was equivalent to the 'Mountain' in the French Convention, and came to be regarded with some suspicion as 'advanced' and 'dangerous', and inclined to mutiny, by the orthodox and experienced greybeards of the Party."[2] But it was not only Social Radicalism which inspired the group of young men. They were also strong Imperialists, specially Haldane and Grey, with Asquith often joining them, and were equally as strong for Imperial Federation as for Home Rule. In November, 1890, it was decided that a formal group must be formed, specifically with the intention of combating the Radicals of the Labouchere bloc. This decision was made on personal and imperial grounds; it is vitally important to note here that in domestic politics there was very little to separate the two groups. But the result of their personal and imperial antagonism was to split the forces working for social reform within the Liberal Party; this was to be of the greatest significance when the time came to choose a new

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1. Haldane, R. B.: An Autobiography, London, 1929, p. 92.
2. Asquith, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 152.

leader to replace Mr. Gladstone and, in fact, continued so until after the end of the Boer War. The group thus formed was to look to John Morley for leadership on domestic affairs, to Rosebery and Henry Fowler on Imperial policy. It may appear strange that a rising group of Social Radicals should look to John Morley for a lead, but it will be remembered that Morley was one of the few Liberals to pay serious attention to the demands of Labour. Moreover, though they were collectivists of a mild sort, the mildness was far more notable than the collectivism. Asquith repulsed the overtures of the Fabian Society, particularly those of the Webbs. Haldane, in an 1887 article, wrote of the working classes: "They do not desire, and will have nothing to do with confiscation. Hence the moderate and safe Liberal, though often a most inefficient representative for them, in many cases comes in by a far greater majority of their votes than could the most ardent Radical."[1] Again: "The books and practical experience have taught us that there is no half-way house between moderate and revolutionary Socialism."[2] This during the years of the early Fabian lectures. In reference to eight hours Haldane said: "The Liberal leaders would do well to make up their minds . . . whether they will even trifle with the demands for class legislation of a mischievous character

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1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 42, September, 1887, p. 322.
2. Contemporary Review, vol. 53, January, 1888, p. 153.

involved in the so-called labour programme. The question is one of principle."[1] In several articles before 1892 Haldane opposed the demand for eight hours [endorsed, it will be recalled, by the T.U.C. in 1890] in terms equally as vehement as those of Morley; as with Labouchere it was only after 1892 that he changed his mind. In later years, Haldane could write of Morley: Had he been less under the domination of views which he derived from those with whom he had worked in older days, he might have shown us the way out of difficulties . . . "[2] But in their days as young Radicals Haldane and his friends were content enough to follow the Clerkenwell and Eighty Club programmes of Morley almost without reservation.

One interesting revelation was made apparent soon after the formation of the new group, when Labouchere and his friends were being specially obstreperous. Rosebery suggested a party meeting, but Haldane wrote: "I pointed out that however useful this might be Labby and Co. would surely profess loyalty and then ask what Mr. G. proposed in home affairs. The answer would be that neither Mr. G. nor anyone else had an idea to broach."[3] Another distressing fact was that the group of young Radicals seemed not to take their politics very

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1. Ibid., vol. 54, October, 1888, p. 468.

2. Haldane, op. cit., p. 96.

3. Maurice, Maj.-Gen. Sir Frederick: Life of Haldane, vol. 1, London, 1937, p. 48.

seriously. Harcourt, who, whatever his faults was a faithful and patient "House of Commons man", wrote to Morley in disgust in January, 1890: ". . . Our youhg men like E. Grey who can speak, won't. Asquith, who will never do a day's work for us in the House, goes about the country doing mischief and gladdening the hearts of the Unionists . . ."[1]

In sum, it is hard not to concur with Maccoby, who writes that even the most Radical Liberals "were mostly rich men, often Dissenters with a grievance or unavowed Freethinkers whose Radicalism meant primarily angry impatience with the great part still played in the state by Lords, Church and Crown . . . . Without these men and others, possessed of the same mentality and wealth, few effective 'advanced' candidatures were possible in a country which still paid its legislators nothing, expected them to finance, from their own pockets, the party machinery of the constituencies, and looked to them, also, for 'becoming' contributions to the workmen's clubs of their divisions, the Friendly Societies and Hospitals, and a most varied assortment of miscellaneous charities besides."[2]

The Imperial question, which was now so significant a factor, first became a burning issue between Liberals in the life of this Salisbury Parliament. As we have seen, the

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 152.

2. Maccoby, Simon: English Radicalism, 1886-1914, London, 1953, pp. 91-2.

1880-85 Liberal Government was not without its clashes on these matters, specially over Egypt and the Transvaal, but it was now that the question definitely awoke. The split in the Party was clear enough. Morley and Harcourt were fervent opponents of a "large" imperial policy, and remained Little Englanders of the old school. Mr. Gladstone was their vehement ally, but his double concern with the Irish question and with the maintenance of party unity did not always render him a dependable ally. Lesser party leaders like Campbell-Bannerman and Mundella felt much the same. On the other side, however, the leader was Lord Rosebery, aided by such a group of rising men as the Asquith-Grey-Haldane faction, and by Henry Fowler on the Front Bench as well as by various ~~adherents~~ elements of the Liberal press. The general movement throughout the country towards a forward Imperial policy grew by leaps and bounds, and reached its greatest heights between 1890 and 1900. Lord Rosebery had been an Imperialist in the days before Imperialism had become either fashionable or formidable; in 1889 he became President of the Imperial Federation League, which had been founded four years before. That year, in a speech at Leeds, he strongly supported both a strong Imperial policy and Imperial Federation. "If they would forgive him this little bit of egotism, he could say from the bottom of his heart that it was the dominant passion of his public life."[1] A month later he spoke to the Imperial Federation League, and the Annual Register remarked: "It was

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1. Crewe, Lord: Life of Rosebery, vol. 1, London, 1931, p. 311.

interesting, as showing the very marked divergence in the views on colonial policy held by the leaders of the Liberal Party."[1] The speech was concerned largely with the need to maintain and extend the Empire, since "trade follows the flag". On March 23, 1892, Rosebery declared: " . . . We must recognise that our foreign policy has become a colonial policy, and it is in reality dictated much more from the extremities of the Empire than from London itself."[2] In the Opposition years Rosebery did much to foster the growth of the League and to forward the growth of Imperialist sentiments, especially among business interests.

On the other side, the anti-Imperialists were growing more and more upset about the language of Rosebery and his friends. Harcourt wrote to Morley, probably in 1890: " . . Spencer was very angry about Asquith joining the Imperial League, and said he was greatly disappointed in him."[3] His biographer adds: ". . . His own disappointment also was great, for he recognised the new force that had come into the ranks."[4] Harcourt wrote to Gladstone on June 19, 1890, that foreign policy was a matter of grave concern: "I fear we are fundamentally at issue with Rosebery on these questions."[5]

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1. Annual Register, 1889, p. 234.
2. Crewe, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 315.
3. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 152.
4. Ibid., p. 152.
5. Ibid., p. 153.

Morley felt equally strongly about the subject; he called Rosebery "neo-Palmerstonian", and it was evident that a Liberal schism over Imperial questions was but a matter of time.

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In 1892, the Unionist Government dissolved Parliament and a General Election followed. The Liberal Party entered the contest with several disadvantages; one was the lack of interest and discredit which had over-hung the Irish cause since the O'Shea divorce case and its aftermath. Another was the lack of a definite policy, the fact that the Liberal Party was by 1892 essentially a party of groups, each with its own "fad" or project. No one but the Grand Old Man could keep the party united, a function which clearly was neither healthy for the party nor capable of being sustained much longer, for the veteran leader was now in his eighty-third year and deeply distrustful of the rising trends of the day. Finally, the record of the Government had been an excellent one in several respects. Three Irish Land Bills had become law, as well as measures to relieve congestion in certain districts and to allow for urban and rural development there. Under the influence of Chamberlain the County Councils Act had been passed in 1888, technical education aided and a Housing Act passed in 1890, and free education, that old standby of the "unauthorised programme", had been passed in 1891, as well as a Factory Act. Clearly in both the political and economic fields the Government had been busy, and Liberal denunciations

of hypocrisy and cant could not remove the fact that the measures had actually been passed. Moreover, the man in the street could look at the imposing list of Irish reforms and speculate as to whether these constructive acts, supposedly typical of "twenty years of resolute government", were not to be preferred to the vaguely "traitorous" implications of Home Rule. Chamberlain with his new "unauthorised programme" of social reforms, which were endorsed by many Conservatives, kept the promise of Social Radicalism equally as much a ~~New~~ Unionist as a Liberal commitment. This new programme included six proposals: parish and district councils, courts of arbitration, effective workers' compensation, public housing, voluntary old age pensions, and eight hours for miners. Again and again he rubbed home to working-class audiences the lesson that social reforms had been delayed by Gladstone's Irish "monomania". Chamberlain said to Arthur Balfour in July, 1892: "The movement for 'social legislation' is in the air; it is our business to guide it. This policy is as much [or more] in harmony with Conservative traditions than Liberal ones. We, the Unionist party, can do it, which the other side cannot."[1] And Balfour, commenting on this talk in a letter to Salisbury, added: "You know that speaking generally I am not in disagreement with Joe's views."[2] Salisbury himself endorsed both Eight Hours and the tentative Old

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1. Dugdale, Blanche: Life of Balfour, vol. 1, London, 1936, p. 211.

2. Ibid., p. 212.

Age Pensions scheme. Hamilton Fyfe says of Chamberlain's conduct during the 1892 election: "He did more than the Gladstonian Liberals to keep the necessity of change before the nation's eyes."[1] W. T. Stead, a sympathetic friend of Liberalism, wrote at the time: "The quondam Jingo party makes it their chief claim to a renewal of confidence that for six years Lord Salisbury has kept the empire at peace, and that the tranquillity of the East has not been disturbed by a simple misunderstanding with Russia. In social legislation, Sir John Gorst is more advanced than Sir W. Harcourt. In the democratising of local government, Mr. Ritchie, [the author of the County Councils Act of 1888] is quite as advanced as Mr. Morley."[2]

The campaign took place in June and July; advocacy of Home Rule was conspicuous on the Liberal Side chiefly by its absence; few candidates apart from the official leadership showed much enthusiasm for it, preferring their own various remedies; the Newcastle Programme was far more in favour than the curing of Irish ills. Even it, however, was not secured. Rosebery, inexplicably, said at Edinburgh on June 21 that the Programme was "still unauthorised",[3] while Morley on the same date strongly supported it *in toto*. In Scotland and Wales

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1. Fyfe, Hamilton: *The British Liberal Party*, London, 1928, p. 119.

2. *Contemporary Review*, vol. 62, August, 1892, p. 290.

3. *Annual Register*, 1892, p. 115.

disestablishment of the Established Churches was the central issue, in England ~~and Wales~~ local option, eight hours, and payment of members were all heavily stressed.

The result of the election was deeply disappointing to the Liberals.[1] Instead of the three-figured majority for which Gladstone had hoped [not without cause, for the Government majority continued to shrink in 1891 and 1892 and was only 66 by the time of the dissolution] the Liberal and Irish forces together could muster a majority of only forty. Two hundred and seventy-four Liberals [including Keir Hardie for purposes of simplification] and 81 Irish Nationalists confronted 269 Conservatives and 46 Liberal Unionists. There was an adverse majority of 72 in England alone, and of 18 in the whole of Great Britain. Only in Lancashire, London, and the "Celtic fringe" had the Liberals shown real gains, though the trend was also strongly in their favour in English rural areas. Many of the Liberal M.P.'s, including Morley and Asquith, had suffered large drops in their majorities; the most remarkable fall of all, however, was that of Mr. Gladstone in Midlothian, from 4,631 to a mere 690. The old man was seriously upset by his tiny personal and party majority. Morley wrote to Harcourt: "The physical decline, in consequence of the reaction from the lofty hopes of a three-figured majority and all the rest of it, rather alarms me. More

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1. See Appendix I.

definite, alas, is the danger in which he finds himself in the region of sight - now seriously threatened. A tragedy indeed."[1] Clearly the "umbrella" could not be held up much longer. Most of the Liberal leaders were in despair; Morley later said of Asquith and himself: "We agreed that a worse stroke of luck than such a majority has never befallen political leaders."[2] Growing more and more opposed to anything resembling socialism in the slightest degree, Morley wrote to Harcourt that part of the loss at least must be attributed to the Liberals having gone "too fast and too far".[3] The latter, a much stauncher Radical than he is usually given credit for or than he habitually made clear to the public, replied: ". . . I will not argue with you on the question of 'too fast and too far' at present, though I do not agree with you. When the Whigs left the Liberal Party they forced the pace and it will go on with accumulated velocity."[4]

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It was thus a chastened and unhappily divided Liberal Party which carried Asquith's vote of no confidence on August 8, 1892, by 350 to 310, and which assumed the seals of office under Gladstone's fourth Ministry. The confidence of Ministers

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 179.

2. Spender, J. A. and Asquith, Cyril: Life of Asquith, vol. 1, London, 1932, p. 74.

3. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 179.

4. Ibid., p. 179.

in the duration of the Government and in the likelihood of its accomplishing legislative success was small. Writing two and a half years later, Sir Wemyss Reid observed: "On that day in August, 1892, when the leading members of the new Government went down to Osborne to receive the seals of office . . . an eminent Cabinet Minister remarked to his colleagues . . . 'I have been thinking over the matter carefully, and I really do not see any reason why we should not remain in for two years.' His words were received with a burst of incredulous laughter from the other members of the Administration."[1]

Who were the leaders of the new Government? What were their social and economic backgrounds? Five of the seventeen, to begin with, were peers [five more were to become so], representing what little was left of the old Liberal and Whig aristocracy. Most of the rest had no occupation other than that of politician, though several had begun at a profession; thus was true of Gladstone himself, Harcourt, Campbell-Bannerman, Trevelyan [who was a historian, but who did not support himself by writing as did J.M. Morley], Arnold Morley, and others. The Cabinet in its entiroty sprang either from aristocratic or bourgeois origins, and among the leading Commoners, many of whom were near kin to the aristocracy, there was a great deal of social intercourse with fashionable society, this being notably true of Gladstone, Harcourt, Morley, and Asquith, specially after his marriage in 1894 to the dazzling Margot

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1. Nineteenth Century, vol. 37, January, 1895, p. 131.

Tennant. The only working-class member of the entire Ministry was Thomas Burt as Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, and Burt was a very placid representative of the Old Unionism. At that, however, Cabinet making was no easy task, despite the similarity of outlook and background among Ministers. Harcourt, who had a terrible temper which he was exceedingly prone to lose, was the most difficult; he bagan by protesting [as it appears now, wisely] against the inclusion in the Cabinet of so many peers, which was bound to displease the Radicals.[1] Next, Harcourt intrigued about the choice of Ministers, holding clandestine meetings at his London home. The Prime Minister felt that his treatment at Harcourt's hands was "brutal . . . Sir William had . . . tried to dictate terms to Gladstone, who had reminded him that he, and not Sir William, was Prime Minister: 'But it is up to us to consider whether we will join you,' Sir William had retorted."[2] The old man

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1. On August 14, 1892, he wrote to Gladstone: "No former precedents can be of any avail in the presence of the increased and increasing strength of democbatic sentiment in the Liberal Party and their indisposition to acquiesce in the paramount claims of the Peers. I feel that besides all the tremendous difficulties which you have to face and the powerful opposition you will have to encounter you will add the greatest of all discouragements, that of a dissatisfied party." [Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 183.]

2. Magnus, op. cit., p. 400.

was incensed; he poured out some of his grief and irritation to Rosebery, who wrote in his journal: "He [Gladstone] said with intense passion, 'You do not know what I have gone through in the past week.'"[1] Another problem lay in the unwillingness of Rosebery himself to take office; the whole party, apparently felt that there was no one else who could take on the Foreign Secretaryship, being perhaps intimidated by the Unionist press, but Rosebery needed much urging from most of the Ministers and the Prince of Wales before finally sending a telegram: "So be it, R." Finally the Cabinet was assembled; Morley and Harcourt had also returned to their 1886 posts, as had Campbell-Bannerman [to the War Office] and Mundella [to the Board of Trade]; Spencer went to the Admiralty, and Asquith and Acland, as known representatives of the new Radicalism, went to the Education and ~~the~~ Home Offices respectively. Labouchere had been a final problem; he had worked hard and long in the 1886-1892 Parliament, and was, as we have seen, the spokesman of a large group of Radicals. The Queen, however, was strongly opposed to his admission to the Cabinet; Gladstone's manner was equivocal, telling one intimate that he wanted "Labby", another that he had never considered his inclusion. The upshot was that the Radical was denied admission, and was also denied the post of Minister to Washington, which he had strongly coveted but which was impossible due to the sharp divergence between his and Rosebery's views of foreign policy and to their

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1. Crewe, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 403.

personal antagonism; he remained in Parliament to be, as he had warned, a source of trouble and intrigue.

It will be useful, at this point, again to study the occupational composition of the Liberal M.P.'s. It will be remembered that the Liberal Party had unquestionably radicalised itself since 1886, that it was now frankly and openly posing as the party of the working man. Its parliamentary representatives, however, were scarcely more representative of their constituents than was the Cabinet itself. Of 273 Liberal Members of Parliament, only thirteen were of the working-class; three of those, moreover, had been elected as independent labour men. Thirty-nine Liberals were country gentlemen or had other independent means, 120 were businessmen [including 25 with textile interests, 9 shipowners, 9 ironmasters, 7 brewers, 6 who owned collieries, 4 company directors, and 3 railway owners], and 101 were professional men. Of the last-named group, however, 57 were some type of lawyer, and very few were professional writers or dons. It is interesting to note that while Liberal representation in Parliament had increased by forty per cent since 1886, the increase of "Lib-Lab" M.P.'s was just over 10 per cent. The number of country gentlemen had gone up by only 5 per cent, reflecting the swing of the landed proprietors away from Liberalism. But the increase of professional men was almost 50 per cent, and that of the business and manufacturing classes was a full 60 per cent. Thus while the City of London and other centres of finance and commerce had joined the

trend towards Conservatism, while the Rothschilds (to take one instance) were Liberal Unionists, yet almost half of the Liberal representation consisted of men of the employing classes, men who were apt to be small employers, who were looked on by their employees with indifference or actual hostility.[1] Most of the rest were from those well-to-do professional classes which were closely aligned to the employing classes. Thus what the Liberal Party was attempting to do at this juncture was to appeal to the working classes for votes while asking the same classes to remain content with a situation in which their own employers represented them. A situation of this sort was doomed to extinction before long; once Social Radicalism and the great catalyst of the Irish question became burning issues the horizontal division of parties which ensued made necessary a whole new political structure.

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Ireland was of course the great task to which the Government set itself resolutely as its supreme problem and test. Many of the elements of the Liberal Party, including the Labouchere Radicals and more than one Cabinet Minister, felt that domestic reforms should be introduced with or before Home Rule; that the Newcastle Programme, that is to say, should take precedence over Ireland. This counsel, or course, could not prevail with a Government whose leading members were

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1. See Appendix II, also Appendix VI.

Gladstone and Morley; the former, moreover, was not only pre-occupied with Ireland, but was positively opposed to the enactment of the "one man one vote" programme, so dear to many Liberal hearts.[1] The Home Rule Bill was threshed out and drawn up by a Cabinet Committee which included besides the Prime Minister and Morley, Spencer, Herschell [the Lord Chancellor], Campbell-Bannerman, and Bryce, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Irish were not consulted about its contents, a false step which would almost certainly have been avoided had Parnell still been alive. By the time that the Bill was introduced, however, Parnell had been dead for sixteen months, and the Irish contingent at Westminster was divided into two bitterly antagonistic factions; seventy-two Nationalists, led by Justin McCarthy, and nine Parnellites, under John Redmond. The latter were hostile to the Liberals, not without cause, and in the last six months of the Rosebery Government definitely joined the Opposition in voting against the Government's proposals. The Bill itself was introduced in February, 1893; it was largely the same Bill as in 1886, but provision had been made for the retention at Westminster of 80 Irish representatives, at first included only for special purposes, but later changed to a permanent, unconditional representation. This change was not enough to satisfy the

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1. See Wolf, Lucien: Life of Ripon, vol. 2, London, 1921, p. 198.

Liberal Unionists; Chamberlain was the strongest and most able of the Bill's enemies, and led a determined opposition, so determined that despite 82 sittings the "guillotine" device of closure had to be introduced. Even so, the Home Rule session of 1893 was at that time the longest in Parliamentary history. Passing its Third Reading on September 1, by 301 to 267, the Bill met a rough, though not unexpected fate in the House of Lords, where a week later 419 peers voted against 41 in rejecting it. At this time there were 560 peers entitled to sit in the Upper House; the feelings of the British aristocracy were plain. So, it appeared, were those of Londoners; a huge crowd gathered outside Palace Yard to acclaim the Peers.

A great deal of time and energy had been spent over the Home Rule Bill; the discipline maintained by the Liberal Whip, Edward Marjoribanks [later Lord Tweedmouth], had been superb, and both Irish and Liberals had guarded the tiny majority of 40 with devotion and care. Not so devoted was the attitude of some of the Liberal leaders, however; one of Morley's greatest troubles was the almost ostentatious displays of indifference shown by Rosebery and by the temperamental Harcourt. Rosebery, who was the Liberal leader in the House of Lords, said on September 7 while the Bill was before the Peers: "Though he was a witness, he was not an enthusiastic witness in favour of Home Rule, which to him was not a fanaticism, not a question of sentiment, scarcely even a question of history,

nor a counsel of perfection, but merely the best course to be pursued in dealing with a critical and complex question."[1]

Morley was in despair about the Cabinet; Sir Algernon West, Gladstone's political aide-de-camp, recorded [December 7, 1892]: "John Morley was very low and unhappy, and said there was never a Government as insincere; they none of them cared for Home Rule but he, Asquith, and Mr. Gladstone."[2] The constant preoccupation over the Bill and the dreadful boredom of the debates grew almost unbearable even for staunch Radicals, and by the time the House of Lords had said nay even they were almost happy to be finished for the nonce with Ireland in one way or another. John Morley has left a record of these months in 1893: "The weeks and months passed by, and the tedium was becoming more and more unbearable as the weather became hotter. The comic paper had a picture of Mr. Gladstone, Harcourt, and me in a boat. Harcourt told me he had laughed heartily at it, as well he might - him sitting idly in the bow, Mr. Gladstone and me tugging at the oars. Sitting idly was not by any means the whole story; pulling at other people's rowlocks would have been more graphic; carrying dead weight would have been comparatively easy . . . Undoubtedly weariness was heavy in men's hearts, and our best friends were beginning to wonder

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1. Annual Register, 1893, pp. 222-3.

2. Hutchinson, Horace G. [ed.]: The Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West, London, 1922, p. 93.

whether, like Napoleon, we were not staying too long in Moscow."[1] From Harcourt's attitude over the Home Rule Bill stemmed the growing estrangement between him and Morley which was so fraught with fateful consequences when Mr. Gladstone resigned.

Following the defeat of the Bill, the aged leader favoured an immediate dissolution and an appeal to the country, a course which his Cabinet overwhelmingly vetoed. A few Radicals in the House of Commons and the Irish favoured the step, to no avail. In later years it has been thought that a mistake was made in not forcing a dissolution; it was easy to be wise after the disastrous defeat of 1895, but there is much merit in the remarks of a young Oxford graduate, writing in 1897: "Never again did the Liberal Government possess a programme so clear and explicit. Never again were they able to ask from the country a verdict on facts so easy of comprehension. They might have been defeated, but it would have been an honourable defeat giving earnest of future victory. It would not have been the disaster of 1895."[2] Moreover, the personality and unifying force of the Grand Old Man would have been present for a last time, rousing moral and religious

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1. Morley, Recollections, vol. 1, p. 364.

2. Essays in Liberalism by Six Oxford Men, [in this case P. J. MacDonnell], London, 1897, p. 266. Writing in the same book, Hilaire Belloc observed: "We allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed by that phrase, worthy of simpletons rather than of rational men, that the House of Lords had agreed beforehand with the verdict of the nation." [Ibid., p. 12.]

fervour which no other Liberal, it would soon be shown, could muster.

The record of the Gladstone and Rosebery Governments in respect to Ireland, for whatever reason, was disastrous. Home Rule had failed in 1893; a bill to restore their land to evicted tenants was thrown out by the Lords in 1894 and a Land Bill had not been passed in 1895 before the Government had fallen. An important section of Irish opinion was estranged, and by 1895 Home Rule was at least as much a liability as an aid to the Liberal Party.

Not only, however, had the Irish problem caused external harm to the Liberals; it demoralised party members as well. As we have seen, Home Rule had appealed less and less to Liberals, until by 1892 Lord Kimberley could state that there was "no enthusiasm for Home Rule in the party."[1] But the Liberal Party was under the dominant spell of Mr. Gladstone, under whose leadership no other issue could take precedence; moreover, it was at the mercy of 81 Irish votes in the House of Commons, thus forced to go through with Home Rule. Under these circumstances, the growing weariness of Liberals was even greater than Morley admitted, and as the hot summer months dragged on and progress with a Bill certain of rejection by the House of Lords crept forward at a glacial rate, discontent and demoralisation were rife. Thus Home Rule was the worst possible issue for the Liberals, and remembrance of the fiasco cast

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1. Slesser, (Sir) Henry: A History of the Liberal Party, London, 1944, p. 130.

its heavy shadow over the remaining twenty-one months of the Liberal tenure of office.

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In the 1892-1895 Governments the Imperial question had at last come prominently to the fore, and the issue was soon faced squarely between the Little Englanders of the historic Liberal tradition on the one hand, and the new Imperialists on the other. Two issues arose immediately to vex the Cabinet. In Uganda the settlers were asking for a railway to be constructed which would mean the certain annexation of that land to Great Britain. Moreover, the British East Africa Company [which had been granted responsibility for the country in 1890] was in financial straits and would soon have to depart altogether unless it was shored up by Government aid. Despite the notice which the Conservative Government had given in 1891 for evacuation, Rosebery determined, virtually single-handed, that Uganda would not be freed. All during the autumn of 1892 the struggle raged; resignations were threatened on all sides, Morley said that Gladstone acted like King Lear, and finally early in 1893 the matter was "compromised". A mission was sent to Uganda to investigate, and in 1894 the country was definitely annexed. Again in Egypt crisis developed; early in 1893 the young Khedive dismissed three of his pro-British advisors and appointed new ones. Both Rosebery and Lord Cromer [formerly the Sir Evelyn Baring of the Gordon affair] took umbrage at this action; the latter insisted that more

troops be sent to Egypt and ultimately got his way, despite the wishes of the majority of Liberals and the stated intention of the Prime Minister to end the British occupation. Gladstone was at sword's points with Rosebery and deeply regretted his action in having appointed him Foreign Secretary.

Nor were the Uganda and Egyptian embroilments the only Imperial problems which divided the Government. The 1894 naval estimates, as we shall soon see, were a bone of deep contention. The threat of a war with France in Siam arose in the summer of 1893. Cecil Rhodes' Chartered Company of South Africa engaged in a war with the Matabele tribe, a war from which Gladstone refused to dissociate the Government. After Rosebery succeeded Gladstone, the problem became even more serious. Lord Kimberley was appointed Foreign Secretary, and as both he and the Prime Minister were in the Upper House, Harcourt, as Leader of the House of Commons, demanded to be kept in close touch with events in the foreign and imperial spheres. Deep antagonism was roused not only by Harcourt's feeling of neglect and his temper, but by his exasperation with what he did succeed in learning. An affair with Nicaragua early in 1895 in which three British gunboats took the law into their own hands led to embittered feelings not only with Nicaragua but with the United States. Sir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons on March 28, 1895, in which he warned that French activities in the Upper Nile area would be regarded as an "unfriendly act" also aroused the enmity of the

Harcourt-Labouchere faction.

In these and other, less important, instances, the split in opinion between the two Liberal factions led to a yawning cavity which was seriously to affect the future of the Liberal Party. In the House of Commons a large group of anti-Imperialists led by the effervescent Labouchere strongly protested against the "forward" and pro-German policies of Rosebery, who had dragged an unwilling Government after him on more than one occasion. Time after time in the House the questions of Egypt, Uganda, or South Africa were raised by Radicals; time after time they were evaded or snubbed, and their protests went unheeded. The most significant result to Liberalism of the mounting agitation on the Imperial question was to divide the party, and to render into irreconcilable factions groups which were otherwise compatible. Labouchere, for example, thoughtRosebery "in domestic politics . . . a very sensible man."[1] But the foreign and imperial cleavage grew steadily, and many steadfast Radicals (like Wilfred Scawen Blunt, for one) were in agony over what was to them the betrayal of old and true Liberal tenets. Writing late in 1893 about the Matabele War, Blunt moaned: "The spectacle of Gladstone, Morley, and the Irish members supporting this anti-human policy in Africa is enough to make dynamiters of us all."[2] A little later, shortly after Rosebery's accession to the

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1. In the Debate on Socialism, p. 13.
2. Blunt, W. S.: My Diaries, one volume edition, London, 1933, p. 116.

Premiership, Blunt wrote: "The Radical jingo is the ugliest feature of modern politics,"[1] and commented that the Egyptian national movement had failed through "the unscrupulous determination of Lord Cromer, acting in what he considered England's Imperial interests, and through the still more unscrupulous money interests worked through Lord Rosebery from London and Paris."[2] Thus the Imperial mania, indulged in partly for its

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1. Ibid., p. 134 [7 March, 1894].

2. Ibid., p. 138. The writer of this thesis does not wish to imply that Lord Rosebery was unscrupulous or dishonest. Still, men's convictions are shaped by their associations, as this whole work has tried to point out, and Rosebery's connections with Imperialist and international finance were great. His biographer comments that he "both liked and admired Cecil Rhodes, who was often his guest. [Crewe, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 565.] Again, "the soaring energy of Cecil Rhodes . . . fascinated him in his active years." [Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 600-01.] Rosebery married a Rothschild, and the biographer of the Rothschild family wrote: "So great was the intimacy between the two families that in 1884, when Rosebery was offered the office of First Commissioner of Works, he refused as he considered that it might be embarrassing, for him to enter the Cabinet while Lord Northbrook's report on Egypt - in which the Rothschilds were so deeply interested - was under discussion." [Roth, Cecil: The Magnificent Rothschilds, London, 1939, p. 87.] At the time Rosebery wrote to Lord Granville: "Though I am not a member of the House of Rothschild, I am allied to it as closely as possible by kinship and marriage . . . " [Crewe, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 212.] Rosebery strongly favoured greater British control in Egypt, as we have seen. At the death of Leopold Rothschild, in 1917, Lord Rosebery wrote: "I have known and loved him for 44 years . . . " [Ibid., vol. 2, p. 653.] Many other examples of Rosebery's tastes and associations could be given.

own sake and partly for less obvious and decidedly less glamorous financial interests, drove a deep wedge into the heart of Liberalism.

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If Ireland and Imperialism were two major issues of the Gladstone and Rosebery Parliaments, the third and [in the long run] by far the most important was the cause of Social Reform, the acceptance of the new wave of collectivism which was gaining adherents so widely, in particular the redemption of the cautious but by no means worthless Newcastle Programme. The Governments of Gladstone and Rosebery accomplished a surprising amount in this field; unquestionably they succeeded in accomplishing more than any previous administration. Let us examine the record.

Early in 1894 the Parish Councils Bill was passed. It established representative councils in thousands of villages and hamlets, democratising the whole system of rural government. Crippling amendments by the House of Lords did not prevent the Act from being a social landmark in local government, continuing the work begun by the County Councils Act in 1888.

Second came Harcourt's epoch-making Budget of 1894. The 1893 Budget had been a staid, unimaginative affair; in 1894, however, a memorial was sent to the Chancellor by 94 Radicals headed by Labouchere, asking that the Budget should be "a poor man's budget," particularly in view of the fact that "for many

years past the budgets have, more or less, been rich man's budgets."[1] The result was a measure which for the first time equalised death duties upon real and personal property.[2] Its revolutionary proposal, however, was the graduation of these duties from one to eight per cent. For the first time the financial device was introduced which was to do such to level incomes and properties in subsequent years. The Income Tax was raised by a penny, though not graduated as Harcourt had at first intended, and tax reliefs were introduced for incomes under £500 a year. An interesting and revealing correspondence ensued between Harcourt and Rosebery, as the latter strongly objected to the egalitarian features of the Budget [which was introduced, in part, to satisfy the demand for increased naval estimates which Rosebery had so strongly supported]. Rosebery wrote to the Chancellor that "the masses do not appear to support the Liberal Party as we have a right to expect."[3] Also that the "cleavage of classes" and "the horizontal division of parties"[4] should be averted at all costs. Harcourt replied in a letter burning with ill-suppressed anger that if the masses did not support Liberalism, "it is probably more the fault of the Party and of its leaders than of the masses . . ."

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1. Fortnightly Review, March, 1894, vol. 55, p. 306.
2. Though Childers had proposed doing so in 1885.
3. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 284.
4. Ibid., p. 284.

Parties on a class basis were "certain to come as a consequence of household suffrage. The thin end of the wedge was inserted, and the cleavage is expanding more and more every day. I do not wonder at your casting a longing, lingering, look on the variety and richness of the intellectual forces which have passed away, but these are not the appanage of democracy . . . Your argument seems to involve that it is necessary to maintain an unequal incidence of taxation in order to avert the breaking up of large properties irrespective of the character of their possessors. This is a very fine old Tory doctrine - it is one the Liberal Party are not likely to accept."[1] Making all allowances for Harcourt's wish to appear a Radical in contrast to Rosebery's Whiggish proclivities, this letter still shows remarkable discernment. Had Harcourt's doctrine been more widely understood or more carefully practised by the Liberal Party, the party would unquestionably have had a longer life.

An Employers' Liability Act was passed late in 1893 and crippled by the Lords so badly that it was decided to drop the measure. The Act, if passed, would have done much, though there still remained significant loopholes, to give workers complete protection against injuries sustained while working, and had intended to prohibit the "contracting out" which had lessened the effectiveness of the Act of 1880. It was the

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1. Ibid., pp. 284-5.

insistence of the Lords upon dropping this last provision which decided the Government to abandon the Bill.

Other measures enacted by Parliament created an eight-hours' law for Railway servants [though this was a private member's and not a Government Bill], equalised London rates as between boroughs, abolished Primogeniture and allowed the London County Council to charge a betterments tax. The last two measures were vetoed by the Lords; the scope of the first was narrowed.

A final measure of social legislation was a Factories and Workshops Act, piloted by Asquith and passed in 1895. It greatly improved sanitary and other conditions in a variety of industries and trades, reduced the hours of women's and young persons' overtime, and made provision for Bank and other holidays. This Act, however, was not opposed by the Conservatives and actually became law several days after the Rosebery Government had fallen.

Administratively there were many changes, accomplishing much more than was done by legislation. The Eight Hours days was introduced for workers in the Education Office, in the factories and workshops of the War Office, in the Post Office Telegraph factories, in naval dock and shipyards. Trade unions were encouraged in Government enterprises, and minimum wages were raised, though not as high as Charles Booth's "poverty line" of thirty shillings. A Labour Department was set up under Mundella at the Board of Trade and a much

greater attempt was made to create liaison between trade unions and the Government. A monthly bulletin from the Labour Department was issued. Mundella also appointed a sailor's representative to every local marine board in the country. Acland enforced free education more completely than had been done before, raised the school leaving age to 11, attempted to see that more and better schools were built and created many evening schools and schools for the blind and deaf. At the Local Government Board Fowler issued regulations to allow Poor Law Guardians to visit their Poor Houses, [which had, amazingly, been hitherto forbidden] issued an order suggesting and authorising lady visitors with supervisory rights, and established the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor. Herschell and Bryce did a good deal to appoint Liberals and working men as magistrates; the latter was especially active in this field in Lancashire, while the former was subject to much censure from the Labouchere Radicals due to the slowness with which such charges were made. The shipping law of 1892 was strictly administered to ensure that food and water supplies should be carefully examined by inspectors. The Coal Strike of 1893 was settled by Lord Rosebery, acting as mediator, while the Cab and Boot strikes were settled by Asquith and Bryce. At the Home Office, Asquith was particularly busy, earning the esteem of Radicals and Socialists alike. He opened Trafalgar Square to demonstrators on weekends, reversing the ban on meetings there which had been in operation since 1888

He declared several more trades to be within the scope of existing Factory Acts, including lead, match-making, potteries, quarrying, and flax and linen milling. He appointed more inspectors to administer the Acts, including twenty-five working men, and created a precedent by appointing women inspectors for women's occupations. Finally, a step was taken towards the establishment of labour exchanges by providing centres in the larger cities where workers could go or write to, in order to register complaints about treatment under the Acts.

These legislative and administrative reforms were not without great value and yet, when they were all added up, what contribution did they make to the solution of the great problems of poverty and unemployment which were so heavily predominant during the 1892-1895 period? Gladstone's Government had been, Bernard Shaw observed late in 1893, a better friend to labour than Lord Salisbury's: "This is perfectly true: to deny it would be to admit that the Collectivist agitation of 1885-92 had failed to influence politics. . . the present Gladstone Government is not more superior to the Conservative Government of 1886-92 than that was to the Liberal Government of 1880-85, or that again to the Beaconsfield Government of 1874-80 . . . . And it is as certain as anything in politics can be that if Lord Salisbury returns to power, his Government will, if only the working classes keep up their pressure, prove itself a better Government than the present. . ." [1] What that was new and original was done, what

1. *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 54, November, 1893, p. 581, pp. 582-3.

lead did the Liberal Governments give to the solution of the crying problems of the day by collectivist measures? In fact, performance fell miserably short not only of what could have been done, but of what had been promised. Let us once again examine the record.

The three most vital matters to the politically conscious working class were the adoption of labour candidates by Liberal caucuses, Payment of Members, and Eight Hours, with special reference to miners. We have already seen that the Liberal answer to the first question combined pious hopes by the leadership with almost total refusal by the constituencies to accommodate the L.E.A.'s, and that, moreover, many labour people felt that more pressure could in fact be put on the recalcitrant caucuses by Liberal headquarters than had been done. On the question of Payment of Members, the Liberal Party stood pledged by the Newcastle Programme, though not without vagueness nor qualification. One hundred and seventy-eight of the newly-elected Liberal M.P.'s in 1892 stood pledged to support the demand, including Morley and Harcourt. The Grand Old Man was, not for the first time, in an equivocal position. He had told more than one intimate that he was opposed to the plan on a basis of payment of all M.P.'s; one of his friends wrote: "His idea was that the Income Tax provisions would provide a modus operandi . . . Labour M.P.'s, on satisfying the Income Tax Commissioners that their income did not reach [say] £300, might become entitled to a cheque for

the difference."[1] In March, 1893, the proposal came to a head. A Payment Bill had been proposed, as a private member's motion despite the fact that the Government was pledged to it. At the Committee stage it was carried by 276 to 229, but then dropped and not carried further. Mr. Gladstone did not vote. In November, 1894, Rosebery met a T.U.C. deputation to discuss the issue, but refused to give it a high priority for legislation. In 1895 the question again arose, at a time when it could not be condemned for intruding upon time needed for the Home Rule Bill; now this old excuse held no validity. On this vote, however, [March 22] the proponents of the Bill could muster only 176 votes against 158: many of those voting aye, moreover, were Irish Nationalists, and it will be recalled that there were over 270 Liberal M.P.'s. On this issue, therefore, Liberalism had entirely failed to meet the demands of Labour.

On the Eight Hours question, the Liberal Party failed on an issue of even more crucial importance. A Bill to enact eight hours for miners, again a private member's, not a Government Bill, came up for its Second Reading on May 3, 1893. It was carried by 280 to 201, but then dropped, as the Government could find no further time for debate. The 280, moreover, included 57 Irish and 39 Unionists; 36 Liberals voted against the Bill and over 50 abstained. Thus on an issue on which

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1. Hamer, F. E. [ed.]: The Personal Papers of Lord Rendel, London, 1931, p. 62.

more than half of the Liberal M.P.'s [including most of the party leaders] stood pledged to action, nothing was done. A Cabinet crisis was, in fact, narrowly averted. The Prime Minister again equivocated. Punch's famous "Toby, M.P." [Sir Henry Lucy] wrote at this time: "On the question of the eight-hours day Mr. Gladstone's own conversion is a remarkable event, and is characteristically conditioned. He would, he said, vote for the second reading of the Bill . . . but could not promise what he would do on the third reading, treating himself to the unusual luxury of definite declaration to the extent that he will not be able to support the principle of coercion. Of course the Bill without coercion would convey nothing more than a benevolent intention."[1] Morley, of course, voted against the Bill, but many quondam opponents, like Haldane and Labouchere, were to be found amongst its supporters. The issue arose again a year later, and the Rosebery Government sent out a five-line whip to its supporters, thus causing much dissatisfaction amongst the more conservative faction of Liberals, "Whig Baronets", as Lord Randolph Churchill called them. A five-line whip in 1894, however, was not compulsory; thus the Spectator commented: "The Bill was not a Government Bill, but was supported by a majority of the Cabinet, and by a 'five-lined' summons issued by the Whip. Mr. Morley and Mr. Burt voted against the Bill; while Mr. Asquith made a strong

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1. Lucy, [Sir] Henry: A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament, London, 1896, p. 126.

speech in its favour . . . The debate presented few points of interest - the chief perhaps being the determined opposition of a Radical philanthropist, Sir Joseph Pease . . . . The debate was a little unreal, as every one felt that only the Government could carry such a measure, and the Government, being divided, cannot act."[1] This time [April 25, 1894] the Bill passed its second reading with an even larger majority than before, 281 to 194. It then went to Committee, where a hostile amendment was carried by 112 to 107, and it was dropped. Again, the Government refused to take an action which might have done much to appease advanced working-class opinion; again it seemed little better than an ineffective, casual friend of labour, and its temporising brought it little favour from Liberal employers, as we shall see.

The three issues discussed above were the most striking examples of Liberal timidity and equivocation in relation to social reform; there were, however, a variety of other incidents, straws in the wind, which indicated to the Labour leaders how little real sympathy they could expect from the Government. Soon after the Liberal assumption of office in 1892, a deputation of unemployed men was formed to see the head of the Local Government Board, H. H. Fowler, who had a name as a strong Radical. John Burns, leading the delegation, asked for some sign of sympathy with the unemployed; the

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1. <u>Spectator</u>, vol. 72, April 28, 1894, p. 570.

Annual Register commented: "Mr. Fowler's utterances when free from the responsibilities of office may have raised the hope that he was willing to recognise that there was an arguable case for State Socialism. His reply as a Minister very promptly dispelled any such illusions."[1] Burns suggested as a first step that in apportioning Government contracts the claims of the locally unemployed should be considered. "Mr. Fowler, in reply, stated that he saw no symptom of general distress, but even if it were otherwise he had little, if any, power of providing work, and could not go beyond asking local authorities to do all in their power for the industrious temporarily out of work, and he strongly insisted upon the axiom that it was no part of the duty of the state to find work for the unemployed."[2] Such a reply would have gladdened the heart of the most ardent classical economist; it is hard to imagine either Balfour or Chamberlain manifesting so little sympathy. Again, in 1893, Keir Hardie moved an amendment to the Queen's Speech, regretting that the speech had said nothing about the grievous problems of unemployment then so prevalent. Mundella, replying for the Government, said that if this amendment were passed it would be tantamount to a vote of censure on the Government, and it was finally supported only by a heterogeneous group of Tory Democrats and Radicals. Asquith sent troops to Hull during the Dock Strike of 1893; despite protests by the strikers and by Keir Hardie in the House of Commons he refused

1. Annual Register, 1892, p. 158.
2. Ibid., p. 158.

to withdraw them. The Featherstone incident took place in Yorkshire in the same year.

Harcourt, as we have seen, held several ideas which were in advance of the general tenor of convictions held by the Liberal Party leadership. He had supported Eight Hours and Payment of Members, and had shown clearly in his memorandum to Lord Rosebery over the Budget of 1894 that he was keenly alive to the social forces which were gaining power. But Harcourt was remiss in carrying out the practical actions which stemmed from these forces; he neglected, for example, to provide for Payment of Members in any of his Budgets, which could easily have been done. In fact, he was sympathetic to the demands of the working classes when they involved no expenditure of Government funds; otherwise he was exceedingly loath to act. He continually attacked the trend towards greater Government spending, and in his Budget speech for 1893, for example, declared: "I believe that the Prime Minister and myself are the last representatives of the vanished creed. The saying has been attributed to me that every one is a Socialist now. I do not know whether I ever said that, but this I will say - there are no economists now."[1] Frederic Harrison, who had known him for years, wrote of Harcourt: "Of course, he never ceased to be the genuine aristocrat at heart, both outwardly and inwardly. I remember him as a friend of [Sir Henry] Maine and a promising barrister in the

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 231.

'fifties, when he was at once elegant and magnificent . . . . He was always instinctively in the grand mood, which was in no way affected to impose on others, but was a native sense that he was both socially and intellectually of the order of magnates."[1] Such a man was not one who would or did willingly accede to working-class demands.

As we have seen, the Newcastle Programme contained far more strictly political elements, compiled from the "fads" of groups within the party, than it did specific social reforms. Even so, however, had the Programme been largely fulfilled in its main proposals it would have marked a great advance in Social Radicalism and would have paved the way for a far more advanced collectivism to follow. In fact, however, the Programme was honoured far more in the breach than in the observance. District and Parish Councils were introduced and passed, death duties were equalised, free education was augmented, the Factory Acts were extended. This is the entirety of the positive realisation of the Newcastle Programme. Home Rule and Employers' Liability were passed, but vetoed by the House of Lords. In the time of the Rosebery Government several measures were introduced, but more, it seemed, for propaganda purposes than anything else; few of them were passed. This was true of Welsh Disestablishment, which was piloted by Asquith [and which was fought by a group of young Welsh Radicals as being not sufficiently far-reaching; their leader was

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 254-5.

Lloyd George/ and which was hurt by the withdrawal of Mr. Gladstone's pair during the spring of 1895, indicating that the assent which had unwillingly been drawn from him had now been revoked. It was true of several attempts at Local Veto of the liquor trade and the alternative of Local Option, of registration reform, of "one man one vote". Finally, we have the category of measures which were not even introduced by the Liberal Government in their three-year tenure of power. This category was probably the most numerous and important of all. It included Payment of Members /which was not, it will be remembered, introduced as a Government Bill/, full powers for the L.C.C. and other municipal authorities, repeal of most of the anachronistic land laws, measures to give local authorities full powers to buy and dispose of land, shorter Parliaments, Scottish Church disestablishment, taxation of land values and mining royalties, housing of the working classes, "Mending or Ending" of the House of Lords /despite repeated provocation/, and the "Free Breakfast Table", which could, again, have been introduced through the Budget.

Thus by their indifference and ineffectiveness the Liberal Governments earned only the contempt of the forward elements of the working and middle classes; they succeeded in satisfying the demands of almost no section of their supporters and incurred more hostility than they won support. In the three questions of supreme importance which faced them, Ireland, Imperialism

and the Social question, they had conspicuously failed. Their failure to provide moderate answers to these burning questions meant that all three of them were solved by more drastic remedies; in the case of Ireland by war and complete political separation, in the Imperial sphere by the Boer War and the Liberal split, and in the Social realm by the eventual supercession of Liberalism by a Socialist Labour party.

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The variegated team of prima donnas which Mr. Gladstone had assembled in 1892 gave him nothing but trouble during the year and a half of his fourth and last Government. Harcourt had not exorcised his vicious temper; by nature, Morley said, "a large-hearted man and a warm-hearted man," he expected that his frequent outbursts would not be taken more seriously than they were meant, nor felt for longer than they were intended, but such was not usually the case. Morley, his quondam intimate, was possessed of an almost super-sensitive temperament, and was quick to take umbrage at Harcourt's actions. As early as November,1892, Morley told Sir Algernon West that he could not remain in the Cabinet if Harcourt stayed. On December 19 West wrote of Morley's anger with Harcourt and general despair: "John Morley very low after an interview with Harcourt . . . told him he would never go and see him again on any subject, after which he softened. 'But why,' said John Morley, 'should one have to go through this on every occasion? Oh! my dear West, Mr. Gladstone is very old. I heard from a non-political

1. Morley, Recollections, vol. 2, p. 12.

friend of a conversation in a bus: First artisan: "Ah, Mr. Gladstone is too old to pass off Home Rule." Second: "Yes, he is that, so old that he must make way for younger men." That is what the public are thinking. There is an old Indian idea that when a great chief dies, his friends and horses and dogs should be buried with him. So it must be with us!'"[1] On July 8, 1893, West recorded in his diary: "Talked with Asquith as to the terrible difficulties connected with Harcourt and John Morley, who quarrel on the Front Bench and refuse to speak to each other."[2] A little later West wrote that "in the Commons nobody could lead with Harcourt there; he appears an impossibility, as his colleagues would neither serve under him nor with him."[3] To the very real divisions over policy, the Prime Minister had thus to add the grave problem of the constant friction over personalities. West recorded after an interview with Gladstone on October 26, 1893: ". . . He said that never before had he had such personal difficulties as these, with Harcourt, Rosebery and John Morley in this Government."[4]

Slowly, the venerable leader saw that his world was fading and that the days of his usefulness were past. Continually he confessed to intimates how incompatible were his temperament and inclinations ~~to~~ with what passed for Radicalism in a new and

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1. Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 95-6.
2. Ibid., p. 173.
3. Ibid., p. 174.
4. Ibid., p. 212.

strange age. We have seen that his desire to dissolve the House and hold a General Election in September, 1893, after the defeat of Home Rule by the Lords had been overruled by the Cabinet. From that point it was only a question of time until the Grand Old Man's resignation must come. The time came soon. Early in 1894 the question of increased naval estimates arose; Lord Spencer at the Admiralty had been won over to the need for increased estimates by his permanent staff, and though he and Harcourt had had a furious argument over the question, a compromise which increased the estimates had finally been arrived at. The Prime Minister, however, could not agree to the increased estimates. He spoke to the Cabinet about his European, indeed world-wide reputation as a man of peace and moderation; he declared that he could about as easily consent to the burning of Westminster Abbey or the destruction of the Rock of Gibraltar as to increasing the estimates at such a time. Finally he went off to the South of France, leaving the question still undecided. Sir Algernon West followed him and attempted to act as a liaison between Gladstone and his Cabinet; he found the Prime Minister reluctant to resign but entirely unwilling to compromise. Meanwhile, in London, Ministers had all come to the conclusion that no recourse was left for their leader but resignation, and as the days and weeks passed without decision they grew profoundly uneasy. At the end of January, the old man devised an alternative plan. The Lords had vetoed Home Rule and a Scottish Fisheries Bill,

and had dealt crippling amendments to the Employers' Liability and Parish Council Bills. Dissolve, Gladstone urged, and fight the election on the cry of "Mend or End" the House of Lords. The implication was that the veteran warrior, then in his eighty-fifth year, would lead the campaign for the last time, then retire, leaving the field open to his juniors. The plan met, the old man confessed, "a hopelessly adverse reply". Harcourt kindly called it "the act of a selfish lunatic",[1] and Asquith wrote in his diary: "We all agree that this is madness."[2] The Prime Minister returned from Biarritz on February 10 with the naval estimates question still unreconciled and undecided; he found that he could count on support from Shaw-Lefevre alone and on the question of dissolution from no one. Finally, at the end of the month, the resignation was decided upon and communicated to Queen Victoria and to the Cabinet Ministers. Later, the old man said: "No retirement! I have been put

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1. Magnus, op. cit., p. 420.

2. Spender and Asquith, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 89. The Cabinet's opposition to fighting the House of Lords is highly revealing of the weakness of the Liberal Party at this time; in 1909 the Liberal Government baited the Lords and jumped at the chance to curb their powers; in 1893-4, however, [as pointed out by Belloc] the Government half believed the Lords' boast of speaking for the nation, and bowed to them, an act of obeisance which notably strengthened the upper House's powers of resistance in the years before 1909. A student of "Liberalism and the House of Lords" comments: ". . . Encouraged by what they were pleased to regard as this popular approbation, the Lords, after long eclipse, acquired a new sense of their importance and responsibility in the Constitution." [Jones, Harry: Liberalism and the House of Lords, 1912, p. 96.]

out!"[1] On March 1 Gladstone made his last speech in the House of Commons [his first had been in 1833], attacking the House of Lords for its attitude towards the Parish Councils Bill. Speaking prophetically, he warned: "The issue which is raised between a deliberative assembly, elected by the votes of more than 6,000,000 people, and a deliberative assembly, occupied by many men of virtue, by many men of talent, of course with considerable diversities and varieties, is a controversy, which, when once raised, must go forward to an issue . . . Differences of conviction . . . between the House of Lords and the House of Commons appears to have reached a development in the present year such as to create a state of things of which we are compelled to say that, in our judgement, it cannot continue."[2] Fifteen years later the controversy had indeed come to an issue.

The break with the past which Gladstone's departure caused was not only a great historic occasion to which British history showed few, if any, parallels, but also a tremendous blow to the Liberal Party. For many years the "umbrella" had covered and soothed differences of opinion; Gladstone's name, moral and religious fervour, and immense popularity with the working classes had been of inestimable advantage. Now he was gone, now the leader who was unquestionably the most remarkable and important figure in the whole vast range of Victorian political life had left, and his party was doomed to

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1. Asquith, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 216.
2. Morley, Gladstone, vol. 3, p. 512.

suffer from the effects of his departure. Except for a somewhat unreal withdrawal from politics after 1874, Gladstone had led the Liberal Party for almost thirty years; the party had long walked in the shadow of his great name. The task of choosing his successor was made even more difficult than it would otherwise have been due to the political and personal incompatibilities which rent the heart of Liberalism. The issue was between only two men, Rosebery and Harcourt.[1] Surprisingly, there was far less support from leading Liberals for the Chancellor of the Exchequer with his long years of experience and service to the party than for the brilliant Foreign Secretary. Morley was the key man in the intrigues which followed, and Morley was, as he had been for some time, estranged from Harcourt on Irish and personal grounds. Despite the similarities between most of his own attitudes and those of the Chancellor, Morley threw all his weight behind Rosebery. Later, Morley wrote that he had told Harcourt: "The thing for us and for the party has a double aspect, how we can best carry on our fight in the House of Commons between now and the dissolution, and how we can offer the best front when the election comes. From the first point of view you are neither more norless than indispensable; from the second, the advantages are with Rosebery." Morley added: "This was undoubtedly the dominant view of the leading junta inside the Cabinet - I mean Spencer, Asquith, Acland, and myself . . ."[2] The

1. Though Gladstone himself preferred Lord Spencer.
2. Morley, Recollections, vol. 2, pp. 14-15.

"dominant view", however, was also conditioned by the fact of Harcourt's irascible personality. Asquith wrote: ". . . To tell the naked truth, he [Harcourt] was an almost impossible colleague and would have been a wholly impossible chief. This, I believe, would have been the overwhelming verdict of the members of Mr. Gladstone's last Cabinet."[1] The vast majority of the Liberal press in the country and in London also supported Rosebery, though it was plain that the rank and file of the party stood behind Harcourt. Labouchere led the Parliamentary faction which intrigued on Harcourt's behalf, and led a group to protest to the Liberal Chief Whip, Edward Marjoribanks, against a peer premier, while Haldane worked equally hard to ensure Rosebery's success.

In the event, the issue was fought on an entirely false basis. Morley had lent his great influence to Rosebery out of pique with Harcourt; the Radicals in Parliament were divided in two, largely on the Imperial question. This was not, however, recognised at the time, and Haldane, for example, regarded it as a clear-cut issue between the collectivist and laissez-faire factions within the party. Mrs. Webb recorded on March 21, 1894: ". . . Haldane unburdened his soul to us. He described how the last ten days had been in reality a pitched battle between the old and the new Radicals . . . The common run of Liberal members was strongly in favour of Harcourt ; the little gang of collectivist Radicals . . .

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1. Asquith, _op. cit._, vol. 1, p. 222.

had forced Rosebery on the Parliamentary Radicals . . . 'It is war to the knife, now,' said Haldane impressively, 'either they or we have to go down.'"[1]

In fact, this argument was totally misleading. Rosebery was no more a "collectivist Radical" than was Morley, and as we have seen on several issues, was considerably more conservative than was Harcourt. Unlike Harcourt, however, the new premier was an unknown quality. The Economist wrote as Rosebery assumed the Premiership: "The main fact about Lord Rosebery has during the past week been again and again reiterated. It is that he is a 'dark horse'. His opinions, that is, upon a large number of the chief questions of the day are entirely unknown."[2] The false issue of Imperialism had been allowed to enter into the picture, and had divided men who might otherwise have leagued together to present to the electorate a unified, collectivist domestic policy. Thus the absence of any strong opposition to Rosebery from any faction but that which Mrs. Webb called the "Labouchere lot", made it possible for the Queen to have her way in appointing him.

Rosebery was a strange figure to be leading the Liberal Party. A peer who had never sat in the House of Commons leading the party which was strongly pledged to curb the House of Lords; a man who had immense wealth and influential connections at the head of the party which called itself the friend

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1. Webb, Beatrice: Our Partnership, London, 1948, pp. 115-6.
2. The Economist, vol. 52, March 10, 1894, p. 296.

of the working man and which desperately hoped that the working man was its friend; a man who was enamoured of the turf and who was to win the Derby twice during his brief Premiership leading the party which contained a strong, puritanical Nonconformist influence, as had been revealed over the O'Shea divorce case, just over three years before; a man, finally, who was a self-confessed and ardent Imperialist as leader of a party which had a long and glorious tradition of peace and non-intervention in foreign affairs. The new Prime Minister was an equivocal figure, a man apparently without strong convictions who had risen to the top by clever intrigue and shrewd appeasement of all factions. St. Loe Strachey, one of the keenest observers of the day, wrote seven months after the start of the Rosebery Ministry: "The Radicals imagine themselves to have obtained the fullest and most positive pledges that the cause of Labour is the one cause which Lord Rosebery has at heart . . . At the same time great care is taken not to irritate the Whigs, the moderates and the capitalists. They are dexterously reminded that Lord Rosebery has a very great stake in the country, and that it is very improbable that he will 'go bald-headed' into anything rash or revolutionary."[1]

The result of the absolute lack of leadership which Rosebery gave was a process of drifting and discord. Justin McCarthy, a sympathetic spectator, wrote of the period after the

1. Nineteenth Century, vol. 36, October, 1894, p. 495.

1894 budget: "The Liberal Government drifted on. Drifted really is the only fitting word to describe the movement; for there was no captain, and there was no pilot."[1] The reputation for being the epitome of glittering success and the easy popularity which Rosebery had won did little to give leadership. No sooner had the new Premier assumed office than he told the House of Lords that he agreed with Lord Salisbury that Home Rule would never be passed unless it satisfied the wishes of the "predominant partner", England. His plea that this remark was only a truism, indicating that a British majority would be necessary for Home Rule was in fact well taken; had England returned Unionists and Liberals in equal numbers, the 1892 Home Rule majority would would have risen to 112. This fact did not appease the wrath of Irish and Radicals, however; the next day a Radical amendment moved by Labouchere to the Queen's address, demanding the immediate abolition of the veto power of the House of Lords, was passed by two votes, 147-145. Moreover, already the feud between Rosebery and Harcourt had begun, a feud which resulted, before 1894 had ended, in the predicament of Liberal leaders in the two Houses not being on speaking terms. As early as May 14, Rosebery wrote to the Queen: "When this Ministry falls, he [Rosebery] hopes to extricate himself from politics for ever."[2] Dissension followed dissension and discipline in the party fell low, in part a reaction to the tight

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1. McCarthy, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 5, p. 383.

2. Crewe, <u>op. cit.</u>, vol. 2, p. 457.

rein which had perforce been held for almost two years. Bill after bill was introduced in the House of Commons without hope of passage; the process was not popular with anyone and was called "filling the cup" by the Liberals, "ploughing the sands" by the derisive Opposition. Almost the only success of the Rosebery Government came in February, 1895, when a great speech of Fowler's on Indian Cotton Duties resulted in the only three-figured majority [304-109] that the Government enjoyed. Rosebery was ill early in 1895 [February 19-21] and also sick of politics; he wished to resign on grounds of non-support and a crisis was only narrowly averted. His only lead to the party was an attack on the Lords, but as it was known that he favoured a strong Second Chamber, though of a different composition from that of the existing House of Lords, little support from the party was forthcoming.[1] Party unity was hardly even pretended; Labouchere was bitterly attacking Rosebery in Truth and a large section of Parliamentary Radicals was alienated from the Prime Minister. Rosebery complained bitterly: I am nothing but a rubbish heap. When they have

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1. Dilke, for example, prophesied when Rosebery became Premier that he would come into conflict "with all that is active in the Liberal Party" unless he renounced "his personal wishes in favour of a reformed but a strong and indeed strengthened Second Chamber." [Gwynn and Tuckwell, Vol. 2, p. 290.] Again, a few months later Dilke commented that "he would like to see Lord Rosebery in the popular House in which he had never sat, and he would like to see Lord Salisbury back again. Their ideas would undergo a change. The reform of the Upper House was now not a Liberal but a Conservative nostrum." [Ibid., pp. 290-1.]

anything agreeable they keep it to themselves, when they have anything unpleasant they bring it and dump it on me."[1] Dilke, once more in the House of Commons, a noted "friend of labour"" and a close ally of Labouchere, wrote in his diary on January 29, 1895: "There is a league between Harcourt and Labouchere against the Rosebery-Asquith combination. Labouchere showed me a letter from Harcourt: "'Hell itself would be pleasant compared to the present situation.'"[2] We catch a glimpse of the feelings of the original Rosebery faction from an entry in Mrs. Webb's diary in January, 1895: "Haldane, utterly discouraged with the condition of the Liberal Party; says there is now no hope that the Cabinet will pull themselves through. With the exception of Acland, none of the Ministers are doing any work: Rosebery sees not one but Eddy Hamilton, a flashy, fast Treasury Clerk, his stud-groom, and various non-political fashionables; Sir W. Harcourt amuses himself at his country place and abroad, determined to do nothing to help Rosebery; even Asquith, under the dominance of his brilliant and silly wife, has given up attending to his department and occupies his time by visiting rich country houses and learning to ride! 'Rot has set in,' says Haldane; 'there is no hope now but to be beaten and then to reconstruct a new party . . .'"[3]

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1. Spender, J. A.: Great Britian, Empire and Commonwealth, London, 1937, p. 73.
2. Gwynn and Tuckwell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 287.
3. Webb, Beatrice: Our Partnership, p. 121.

Under such circumstances, it is scarcely strange that the Government was visibly tottering. Rosebery was not the only one to seek repose after almost three years of constant turmoil, and the opportunity was seized on June 21, when a vote of censure on an insignificant question of the sufficiency of the supply of Cordite was carried by only 132 to 127. The majority was less than half the total strength of the Opposition, but the Government had had enough of the dreary business of ruling by so tiny and unstable a majority, and resigned immediately. As Asquith said, it had lived long enough "from hand to mouth". Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister again, and the dissolution was declared early in July.

The Liberal Party took the field for the election contest at a marked disadvantage. They had lost their peerless leader; their record was unenviable, and they went into battle torn by disunity. A meeting of ex-Cabinet Ministers was held after the Government's fall in June, and election strategy was discussed. Harcourt's son Lewis wrote in his journal: "Rosebery made a mild protest against the pushing of the Newcastle Programme, with which he declared he had never been associated."[1] Most of the party, on the other hand, stood strongly pledged to the Programme in part or in whole and were determined to support it. The Liberal Party was by now unquestionably a party of groups, a coalition more than a unified force, a collection of peripheries without a centre.

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 366n.

There was Radicalism of a Celtic variety, concentrating on Home-Rule-All-Round and Church disestablishment. English Nonconformists endorsed this stand and emphasised the schools issue. There was a temperance and Local Option group, an anti-Lords group, and a faction of old Liberals decidedly unhappy about the trend of modern Liberalism. After the 1894 Budget, for example, Alfred Illingsworth announced that he would not stand again for Parliament. He was a Radical of the old type, and had strongly supported Home Rule, Local Option, land law reform, and Church disestablishment, but he was a large employer of labour and "was unable to go with the Government in their drifting towards State Socialism, as shown by their action on the Eight Hours' bill . . ."[1]

But if the Liberal Party was not pleasing to the Illingsworths, it held little attraction for working-class voters either. The leaders of the Radical faction in Parliament were not men who could channel the new demands for social reconstruction into effective action. Robert Wallace, a discerning Liberal M.P., wrote in June, 1894, that it was necessary to recognise that Socialism was the force of the future, and that the Liberal Party must make its mind up how to react to it without delay or equivocation. "With the great mass of the people the bread question is the one that is urgent . . . That is really why Radicalism makes very little headway in Parliament;

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1. Annual Register, 1894, p. 146. This was presumably a reference to the five-line whip on the 1894 Bill.

and for the present will not prove formidable as a distinct party. There is no popular driving force behind it. Sir Charles Dilke, Mr. Labouchere, Mr. Storey, and Mr. A. C. Morton are zealous and industrious gentlemen, but they do not succeed in stimulating the Government to much of what they desire, and would certainly never dream of putting them in a position of danger . . . . The Radicalism of the House of Commons is not of the bitter, earnest, and uncompromising order. It makes its occasional protest against the inevitable opportunism of the Government, and uses very strong language about 'Whigs' . . . . Latter-day Radicalism . . . expends its energy in speech . . . . Radicalism is in a paradoxical position . . . . Unless, upon platforms, a Radical declaims against the House of Lords, and even hits indirectly at the Crown, he will not be returned to Parliament. But having been returned, if he proceeds to give effect to those ideas, and were to turn out a Ministry for the sake of them, he would equally not be returned at the next opportunity. The bulk of the people are not thinking about such theoretical grievances . . . Even disestablishing Churches does not convulse the country, while, with judicious management, the Throne and the Peerage may hold their own for a long time to come . . . The heart of the community is in the social question . . ."[1] Neither the Labouchere group nor the Asquith-Haldane-Grey faction, that is, could pose any effective answers to the problems of the day. Even the actions of

1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 55, pp. 711-3.

Asquith and Acland, the recognised leaders of advanced Radicalism in the 1892-1895 Cabinets, had performed no other than ameliorative functions. No one in a position of authority in the Liberal Party was willing to tackle the problem which Wallace so accurately diagnosed: "The bread question is the one that is urgent." Slowly the Liberal Party was being forced to recognise that it could no longer equivocate; one of its working-class critics pointed out: ". . . If the wealthy Liberals will go bag and baggage over to the enemy on so elementary a plank in democratic reforms as payment of members, then they will go over on many other questions that are now looming up. The Liberal Party will have to recognise that they cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds; they cannot serve mammon and humanity. They have either to say goodbye to 'vested interests' which will 'rat' at each fresh lap of the democratic wave, or the labour movement will say good-bye to them."[1] Writing a post-mortem of the election, the Spectator agreed: "Lord Rosebery and his colleagues fell between two stools; and trying to please both sides, pleased neither."[2] At times the Liberal leaders recognised - or said they did - the dilemma; Rosebery, for example, said on March 21, 1894; "I am certain that there is a Party in this country - unmanned as yet, that is disconnected with any existing political organisation - a party that is inclined to say, a plague on both your houses, a plague on all your politics, a

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1. Contemporary Review, vol. 56, August, 1894, p. 278. The writer is Clem Edwards.
2. The Spectator, vol. 75, October 12, 1895, p. 479.

plague on all your unending discussions that yield so little fruit."[1] Morley said, soon after: "Now, I daresay the time may come - it may come sooner than some think - when the Liberal Party will be transferred or superseded by some New Party."[2] Many of the Liberals' more advanced supporters had now begun to desert the sinking ship; Andrew Reid, a stout adherent until 1892, wrote in 1894: "The Liberals are . . . the Tinkering Party - The Fainting Party - the Expiring Party."[3]

Gradually Liberalism was brought to the realisation that it was not, after all, the party of the overwhelming mass of the "people"; Keir Hardie, for example, wrote in January, 1895: "It is still a fiction in politics that there are no Conservative working-men. One has only to mix with the workers to discover how baseless such an assumption is."[4] A month later, St. Loe Strachey wrote in a revealing article that the Liberals acted as if the suggestion that the workers were not all Liberals was "an actual blasphemy". Strachey, on the other hand, wrote of the worker: "If he let his dislike of those above him be his guide, he would become a Tory, for in all probability the majority of the people above him in his own immediate circle would be Gladstonians. People are apt to talk as if the working man, when he thought of the

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1. Reid, Andrew [ed.]: The New Party, London, 1894, p. vii.
2. Ibid., p. xi.
3. Ibid., p. 421.
4. Nineteenth Century, vol. 37, January, 1895, p. 9.

rich, thought of some conspicuous duke, or of this or that millionaire. But in most instances these are to him mere shadows, abstractions of the newspapers, and not things of flesh and blood. When the working man thinks of the rich he thinks of his employers, of the big general dealer in his quarter of the town, of the miller or middleman who has thriven till people shake their heads over his luck and envy it . . . Indeed . . . the pushing successful men of business in a small way are generally inclined to the Home Rule side."[1]

Had Liberal leaders given the party clear direction at this crucial election it was still possible that the catastrophe might have been averted, at least in its extreme form. But they shirked the social issue, and each rode off in his own direction; Rosebery [who virtually repudiated the Newcastle Programme] on an anti-Lords platform, Harcourt towards Local Option, while the faithful Morley still clung to Home Rule. Rosebery, in fact, displayed contempt for the whole campaign, by hiring a yacht for a month when the heat of the fray was at its height. Deserted, Liberal candidates campaigned on whatever they thought most fit for their constituencies or their own temperaments. The result of the collection of "fads" was an aroused opposition of interests, including publicans, brewers and Church; there was no great central issue around which the party could coalesce. The Newcastle Programme was still prominent, but what was most obvious was that there was no

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1. *Ibid.*, February, 1895, pp. 208-09.

cohesion or unity left in the party.

Liberalism was facing, Halévy writes, a double crisis. First was the lack of money. Most of the nation's wealth had gone over to the other side, and candidates were hard to find who could pay their own way.[1] The quality of those who did come forward, moreover, was markedly low. The result was that 124 seats went by default to Conservatives or Liberal Unionists, while only 10 were won unopposed. "If in the August of 1895 the Liberal agents had been asked what in their opinion was the immediate cause of their defeat, they would all have replied without the least hesitation that it was lack of funds and lack of candidates."[2]

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1. Ensor points out, strikingly: "In 1870 the Government of the day had behind it the stronger party in the country; and among its followers in Parliament were the two members for the City of London. Pass a quarter of a century, and come to the Government brought into power by the general election of 1895. Exactly the same two things may be said of it; it too had behind it the stronger party in the country; it too numbered among its followers in Parliament the members for the City of London. Only, whereas the Government of 1870 was Liberal, the Government of 1895 was Conservative. That quarter of a century had witnessed the transfer of the City of London's political allegiance from Liberalism to Conservatism; and therein the City's opinions corresponded to those of the business and moneyed classes generally." [Ensor, R. C. K.: in Schuyler and Ausubel [eds.]: The Making of English History, New York, 1952, pp. 534-5.]

2. Halévy, Élie; A History of the English People, 1895-1905, Book 1, Harmondsworth, 1939, p. 23.

The second crisis was the dearth of policy. There was very little in the way of a social programme, while the Unionists under Chamberlain and Sir John Gorst's lead proposed quite far-reaching reforms. Halévy points out: "A programme of social reform had . . . been adopted [by the Liberals]. . . but it was public knowledge that a considerable section of the leaders had only accepted these portions of the Liberal programme with extreme reluctance. And moreover, no one could fail to notice that the proposals for social reform put forward by many Liberal Candidates were for practical purposes indistinguishable from those presented by a considerable number of Unionists loyal to the tradition of Beaconsfield or friends of Chamberlain."[1] In an article in the July Nineteenth Century, for example, Gorst proposed that local authorities should give work on a small scale to the locally unemployed, supported a comprehensive measure of employers' liability, state care for homeless children, and cautiously suggested old age pensions. Moreover, he supported better hospitals and more adequate staffs, and declared in a far-seeing phrase: ". . . Society should provide free medical advice and treatment for all who see fit to apply."[2] Chamberlain boldly supported old age pensions as a central issue of the campaign. Writing shortly after the Election, an observer commented: "The most remarkable thing about Conservative-Unionist election addresses

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1. Halévy, op. cit., Book I, p. 24.

2. Nineteenth Century, vol. 38, p. 14.

was the unanimity with which they all testified to recognition of the fact that the great masses of the workers attach, and very naturally, far more importance to the amelioration of their economic condition than to such Liberal projects as those of 'Concentration Against the Lords', 'Irish Home Rule', and 'Local Veto'."[1]

In Imperial policy there was again a disadvantage. There was a ground-swell of imperial sentiment which would be bound to react against the Liberals even had the whole party firmly resolved upon and staunchly supported a pacific, non-aggressive policy. But the division between the Harcourt-Morley faction on the one hand, and the Rosebery faction on the other meant that Liberals promised different policies in different places. "But if a policy of imperialism must in any case be adopted, the imperialism of Lord Salisbury and Chamberlain was preferable. It was perfectly frank, and was not compromised by an alliance either with the supporters of peace at any price, or, and this was the decisive factor, with the partisans of Irish Home Rule, the would-be disrupters of the United Kingdom."[2]

The election, then, was a catastrophe for the Liberals, a sweeping victory for the Unionists. Though just over 220,000 votes changed hands, 340 Conservatives and 71 Liberal Unionists faced 177 Liberals and 82 Irish Nationalists.[3] Liberalism

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1. J. S. Stuart-Glennie in the Fortnightly Review, vol. 58, December, 1895, p. 852.

2. Halévy, op. cit., Book I, p. 25.

3. See Appendix I.

had suffered a disaster worse even than that of 1886, for not only had it won fewer seats, but it was left with no great leader and no great cause to impel it forward. Halévy writes: "It was generally felt - and the writer bases this assertion not on the evidence of documents which he had consulted but on his own personal reminiscences - that the election of 1895 marked a turning point in the moral and political history of the British people."[1] Mrs. Webb spoke of "the utter rout, the annihilation, one might almost say, of the Harcourt faction - the hopeless discredit into which such reforms as Local Veto, Home Rule, Church Disestablishment, have fallen."[2] Harcourt, Morley, Shaw-Lefevre and Arnold Morley, among Liberal ex-Cabinet Ministers, lost their seats. In Harcourt's case his identification with local option was the deciding factor, but his biographer comments: "Moreover, the labour organisations, which had hitherto advised their members to vote for the Liberal candidates, gave no such advice on this occasion, telling their members that they should vote as they pleased."[3] Eight of the 28 I.L.P. candidates caused a Liberal defeat [including that of John Morley in Newcastle], as did two S.D.F. candidates. The rout was complete, a fitting rebuke from the electorate to a party at odds with itself.[4]

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1. Halévy, op. cit., Book I, p. 19.
2. Webb, Beatrice: Our Partnership, p. 126.
3. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 370.
4. See Appendix V.

It was a dispirited group of Liberals which returned to Westminster in the autumn of 1895. Moreover, it was no more unified than it had been before the election. The Spectator said in October: "There is at the present moment absolutely no one who commands the confidence of the party, and there is no measure which appeals to the Gladstonians . . . . There is, in fact, a total want of both measures and men."[1] In August Rosebery, in a letter to Spencer, manifested "an irrevocable decision not to meet Harcourt in council any more."[2] At first it was thought that this would mean that Rosebery would retire from the leadership, but later an arrangement was patched up whereby Harcourt and Kimberley continued as leaders of the two Houses, with Rosebery retaining a shadowy titular leadership. Harcourt was left to occupy the Front Bench almost alone, for he observed to his wife that Asquith was in Scotland, Campbell-Bannerman was in Germany, Bryce in South Africa, Acland ill, and Fowler unwilling to appear. The decimated party which was left could look without success to its official leadership for guidance. Personal antipathies far more than political divergences separated the leaders from one another, for almost no one had any policy to propose. Almost the only hopeful sign, in fact, was the reconciliation between Harcourt and Morley, which had been slowly taking place ever since the formation of the Rosebery Government. Thus unhappy, leaderless, without a programme, the Liberal Party faced ten years of Conservative Rule

1. Spectator, vol. 75, October 12, 1895, p. 479.
2. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 377.

CHAPTER 7

LIBERALISM DISCREDITED, 1895-1900

Had its leaders understood wherein lay the causes of the crushing defeat of 1895, the Liberal Party would perhaps have made a speedier and more thorough recovery than it did in the years before the end of the century. None of the principal leaders, however, drew any conclusions from the Election other than that a specific programme had been a mistake and that in the future voters should be asked to support a party with a creed but with no programme. Just after the election Campbell-Bannerman wrote to Asquith: "we must send politics to the devil for six months at least . . . "[1] Sir Henry Fowler, another ex-Cabinet Minister, said to his Wolverhampton constituents on January 27, 1896, that the lesson which he had learned from the Election was that "you cannot legislate in advance of public opinion,"[2] as the Liberals had done in proposing measures which had not the necessary amount of popular support. Lord Rosebery went about the country spreading gloom, advising no action, and creating dismay among his followers.

Meanwhile, the sentiment of the Liberal rank and file was far different from the attitude of caution and apathy of the party leadership. While trade union membership was ~~still~~ again growing and a new series of strikes was beginning, Liberal and

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1. Asquith, H. H.: Fifty Years of Parliament, London, 1926, vol. 1, p. 245.
2. Annual Register, 1896, pp. 10-11.

especially Liberal working-class opinion was restless for some demonstration of the support and sincerity of the leadership. Looking back on this era, Francis Channing, for long a Radical M.P. for a rural Midland constituency, wrote that the social and labour movements, which had begun about 1880, had by 1895 become reality. "In 1895 dreams and ideals were crystallising into positive proposals and thought-out schemes. The spirit now was deeper, more earnest, more insistent, among advanced Liberals, whose sheet anchor was individual freedom of initiative aided by the State, and working through local self-government, or among Socialists of all shades who would merge individualism into collective action."[1] Amid a welter of recriminations about the various parts of the Newcastle Programme, as to which were assets and which were liabilities at the polls, Channing saw clearly and from personal experience in his own area that the adoption of a far-reaching Labour programme would revolutionise the whole structure of party politics. "I am confident," he wrote later, "that a bold acceptance of a definite labour programme, in addition to the proposals as to Rural Reforms, and the stereotyped but rather hackneyed list of disestablishment, local option, registration and taxation, each appealing only to special groups, would have made all the difference. A big generous policy would seem wiser for a great party than

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1. Channing, F. A. [Lord]: Memories of Midland Politics, 1885-1910, London, 1918, pp. 172-3.

the log-rolling which faddists like."[1]

The lack of understanding of what had caused the disaster of 1895 or what should be done in the future to reverse it, added to the divisions among the leadership, produced in the Liberal Party by the beginning of 1896 a state very nearly approachingng complete inertia. Rumours of Lord Rosebery's resignation due to the incompatibility between him and Harcourt were already circulating. J. A. Spender, then the editor of the Liberal Westminster Gazette, later wrote of 1896: "The Liberal Party was in an extraordinary plight at the beginning of this year. It had suffered a crushing defeat at the polls, and seemed hopelessly committed to the failing cause of Home Rule. The illustrious retired leader sat at Hawarden, and though he announced himself a 'person politically dead' his interventions were frequent and highly inconvenient to the leader in being. . . . There was trouble among the lesser deities which with great difficulty was prevented from becoming scandal. Communications were completely broken between the leader of the party and his principal spokesman in the Commons, and the ex-Cabinet was in a puzzle how to meet and how to find a plausible excuse for not meeting. I had watched it boiling up to this point for the past two years, and was on civil terms with both groups, but it was soon evident to me that something must break. Either Rosebery or Harcourt must

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1. Ibid., p. 117.

give way or the ruin would be irretrievable. Even the cheerful Tom Ellis /the Liberal Chief Whip/, who worked feverishly to keep the ship afloat, was driven to this conclusion."[1]

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The years between 1890 and 1900 were the years par excellence of the Imperialist predominance in British public life. The length of the period of the new drive towards Empire has been overestimated by many historians; though territory was being acquired steadily in the late Victorian era and at a colossal rate from the middle 1880's, it was only after 1880 that Imperialism became one of the principal phenomena in British political life, and only after 1890 that it began to acquire that soaring popularity which collapsed so quickly at the end of the Boer War. As long as the personality of Gladstone had remained in political life and as long as his shadow had influenced the Rosebery Government the attitude of the British Government had been, at least in theory, anti-expansionist and pacific, but with the Unionist triumph of 1895 this situation changed suddenly. The writings of Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, W. E. Henley, Rider Haggard and others, the glamour of the capture of new territory and peoples was now given full vent. Lord Salisbury, who a few years before had been denounced by Liberals as too imperialistic, was now actually popularly held to be the last survivor of the old Gladstonian tradition - so fast do political mores change!

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1. Spender, J. A.: Life, Journalism, and Politics, vol. 1, New York, 1927, pp. 65-6.

Joseph Chamberlain, now joining frankly with the Conservatives in a strong Unionist Government, was pushing the Prime Minister-Foreign Secretary much further and faster in the direction of imperial gain and foreign alliances than Salisbury wished to go, and was backed by an increasing volume of public opinion. Thus Chamberlain, this amazing and enigmatic personality, once more rose to the centre of the political stage, which he was to dominate for another ten years. Having changed parties and concepts, having been denounced by his former associates and accepted only unwillingly by his new allies, Chamberlain was now to hold ascendancy by an entirely different combination of circumstances and measures from those of his Radical days.

The Imperialist lust, now led by Chamberlain and becoming daily more popular in the homes not only of the wealthy and powerful but of the working classes as well, had a threefold basis. One was a frankly commercial interest. Many Unionist M.P.'s held shares in Imperial companies, far more than did Liberal Members, and profited immensely from the vast accretion of wealth which their holdings had brought, particularly in Africa, where Cecil Rhodes, premier of Cape Colony since 1890, had gained about 750,000 square miles of territory, including gold and diamond fields of incalculable wealth. Wealthy Liberals like Rosebery were also interested in the personal and public accretions of wealth which the colonies produced. While this wealth was more apparent than

real, for the older colonies and dominions were actually far more profitable than the new acquisitions, great efforts were made to secure financial gain from the new colonies. The industrial depression and the growth of strong trade unions at home had turned British investors to search for foreign markets, so that by 1900 a full half of annual British savings took the form of foreign investments. Both "high finance" and the desire to be secure from the mounting force of foreign [particularly German and American] competition contributed to the desire for the aggrandisement and commercial exploitation of the Empire. Cecil Rhodes, an avowed Liberal and a dreamer, was an extreme example of the commercial Imperialist class with his advocacy of "philanthropy plus five per cent." In 1892 Sir Edward Grey wrote to his wife: "I dined with Rosebery last night to meet Rhodes. Rhodes is not exactly what you call a Liberal: he has a new version of 'one man, one vote' for South Africa; viz., that he, Rhodes, should have a vote, but nobody else should."[1] Grey's opinion of Rhodes, however, was to alter in subsequent years. The general atmosphere of high finance which pervaded Parliament was described in the summer of 1899 by the Economist, a strongly Unionist paper: "It is undeniable that during the session just ended there has been an atmosphere of money in the lobby and precincts of the House of Commons scarcely known before. All manner of interests have gathered there, as they gather

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1. Trevelyan, G. M.: Grey of Fallodon, London, 1937, p. 61.

in Washington and in the various State legislatures in America. More attempts to influence the votes of members have been made than has been known before, or, at any rate, than members can recollect since the days of railway-construction. Incidents connected with the Telephone Bill, the Petroleum Bill and the Clerical Rates Bill point to a closer connection between finance and legislation than is desirable or safe."[1]

But if capitalist seeking for gain was one of the motives which contributed to the Imperial surge forward, it was not the one which inspired the huge popular support for Imperialism which was increasing year by year in Great Britain. There were also two other motives, curiously intermixed, one a desire for the white race [particularly the Anglo-Saxon portion thereof] to rule over inferior species with all the glamour of Imperial adventures, the other a semi-religious motive of service to the world, prompted by a sense of mission. If the appeal of Chamberlain was vulgar to an extreme, pandering to mass hysteria and being entirely devoid of any higher sentiment, the poems of Kipling were a mixture of the base and the lofty, a plea for gain but combined with a real conception of "the White Man's Burden" and a remembrance of the "Lord God of Hosts, lest we forget". Later ages may sense a hypocrisy masking base and selfish motives, but it would be idle to ignore the contribution towards the future of humanity which the Imperialists of those years, even a man like Cecil Rhodes,

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1. Economist, vol. 57, August 12, 1899, p. 1151.

felt themselves to be making. Drunk with the "glory" of annexing almost 5,000,000 square miles in thirty years [roughly 1870-1900] and intent upon painting the world red, Imperialists felt themselves to be making a great step towards the civilising of all the world. Typically the Spectator, a moderate Liberal Unionist Journal with a great editor in St. Loe Strachey and not given to journalist excess, wrote on February 11, 1899: "The duty of the white man is to conquer and control, probably for a couple of centuries, all the dark peoples of the world, not for his own good, but for theirs; to give them the chance of development which comes with a stable and well-ordered peace; to break for ever, if such breaking be possible, that strange arrest of progress which for so many centuries has benumbed their progress . . . . It is surely the duty of the white man, who has advanced so far that he is almost bewildered by the rushing multitude of his acquirements, who has made of himself through the favour of God a restrained and self-controlling human being, and who can put on at will for any task the enchanted armour of science which no barbarian force, however vast, may pierce, to try at least whether he cannot terminate this arrest, and set the whole race of man free to work out the destiny intended for him."[1] Not only the Unionists wanted empire, however, as we shall see more fully later. The Radical Baptist preacher, Dr. Clifford, said at the City Temple on May 10, 1898: "God has chosen us as his colonisers and missionaries . . . we must not seek

1. Spectator, vol. 82, February 11, 1899, p. 194.

empire; we must have it . . . . It cannot be helped, it must be so. The forces these ideas have in them are the pledge, first of all, of the complete consolidation of the Anglo-Saxon people, a consolidation which is being pushed forward just now by the war between Spain and the States; and afterwards we must advance together till the Kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ . . ."[1] To gain territory seemed an end in itself, "though," as Wingfield-Stratford writes, "in what sense this territory was 'possessed' by England, or how much such possession could profit the possessors, no one at the time paused to enquire. If you coloured territory red, the Queen had it, the Empire had it, you and I had it, and that was all there was to it."[2]

This combination of worthy and inglorious, selfish and self-deceiving motives, therefore, was built up in the period after 1895 until it was well-nigh uncontrollable. Not only Chamberlain, Rhodes, Kipling, and other noted adventurers encouraged the trend; the founding of the Daily Mail in 1896 by the Harmsworth brothers and the subsequent immense surge forward in the popularity of the cheap press further swelled the Imperialist bubble, for the emphasis of the new papers was strongly Imperialist. Simultaneously in other countries the same motives were operating; in Germany a drive for "a place in the sun", in the United States the releasing of the

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1. Maccoby, Simon; English Radicalism, 1886-1914, London, 1953, pp. 260-1. The war referred to was the Spanish-American war of 1898, a conflict caused chiefly by American Imperialism.
2. Wingfield-Stratford, Esme: The Victorian Sunset, London, 1912. p. 357.

latent force of "Manifest Destiny" were also gaining strength by leaps and bounds.

The first overseas source of difficulty for the Liberal Party, however, was not imperial but foreign. In the autumn of 1894, massacres by the Turks of the Armenian Christians had begun, massacres of a horrible character and extent, and which continued intermittently for the next three years. It was exactly this sort of event which had brought Gladstone out of his first retirement in the late 1870's, and the renewed slaughter roused the old warrior to his last battle. Though he recognised his impotence, and though he told his son that if he were twenty years younger he would have led another crusade, yet he did not rest. He spoke to a deputation at Hawarden on December 29, 1894, his eighty-fifth birthday, and as the massacres continued, wrote articles and public letters and made an address to a crowd at Chester on August 6, 1895. A year later, on August 26, 1896, three days and nights of massacres began in Armenia, at the end of which 6,000 Armenian Christians had been killed. On September 24 the Grand Old Man made his last public speech at Liverpool, lasting an hour and twenty minutes. In it he deplored the action of the Turks and called for unilateral action by Great Britain to right the tragic wrongs of the Middle East. His words, however, did not meet with the same popular reception as in the 'seventies; while many Liberals answered the clarion call others held back, partly because Lord Salisbury had gone some

way towards intercepting the agitation by denouncing the massacres and calling for united action by the Concert of Europe - which, however, was in view of the lack of harmony amongst the Concert, a disguised plea for inaction.

To Lord Rosebery, however, the Liverpool Speech was the last and a not unwelcome straw. His quarrels with Harcourt and his supporters, his advanced Imperialist views and his pronounced lethargy all made him eager to give up the leadership, and in the agitation over the massacres he saw his chance. In a letter to the Liberal Chief Whip, Tom Ellis, dated October 6, 1896, Rosebery said: ". . . Scarcely from any quarter do I receive explicit support. This situation, except as regards Mr. Gladstone, is not altogether new."[1] The next day Rosebery wrote in a letter to Gladstone: "I wish you to know from myself that I have resigned the leadership of the Liberal Party - that is, if I ever held it, of which I am not quite sure!

"I will not disguise that you have, by again coming forward and advocating a policy which I cannot support, innocently and unconsciously dealt the coup de grace; by enabling discontented Liberals to pelt me with your authority."[2]

On October 9, Rosebery made a public address at Edinburgh in which, after referring to Gladstone as "our leader", said that he could not approve of the policy of single-handed intervention in Turkish affairs which the old man, supported by

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1. Annual Register, 1896, p. 190.
2. Magnus, [Sir] Philip: Gladstone, London, 1954, p. 431.

much Liberal opinion, wished to pursue. "Against the policy of solitary intervention in the affairs of the East," he declared, "I am prepared to fight tooth and nail."[1] Bluntly, Rosebery continued: "Isolated action by Great Britain means a European war."[2] Then: "Of the internal difficulties I will only say that they were not less than the external . . . My position was so hampered that it had almost become untenable."[3] Instancing the Labouchere amendment passed in 1894 and the failure of the party to concentrate on the House of Lords issue at the General Election of 1895, Rosebery said that a peer Premier "has no chance of succeeding in the leadership of the Liberal Party unless he receive very exceptional support, very exceptional loyalty, and very exceptional co-operation from the party inside and outside Parliament . . . I cannot say that I received it - rather was my being a peer . . . urged as a reason for further hampering my efforts."[4]

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1. Halévy, Élie: A History of the English People, 1895-1905, Book 1, Harmondsworth, 1939, p. 69.

2. It is notable that the Liberal Imperialists objected to a possible war to rescue a subject people, but were quite ready to face conflicts over Imperial issues, unlike the Gladstonians.

3. Annual Register, 1895, pp. 193-4.

4. Gardiner, A. G.: Life of Harcourt, vol. 2, London, 1923, p. 417. What the anti-Roseberyites in the Liberal Party thought of the situation may be gathered from a letter of Harcourt's to Morley on October 26, 1896: "Of course the reasons given by Rosebery for bolting are not the true ones. It was neither Mr. G. nor our humble selves his colleagues. I believe he funked the future which he saw before him - that he felt called upon to say something on politics in general and give a lead, and that he did not know what to say and so took up his hat and departed. What I think we have to

This resignation, however, did not clarify matters within the party. Already there was a strong group of what were coming to be called "Liberal Imperialists", led by Rosebery and supported in the House of Commons by the force of the most rising and able group in the party; Fowler, Asquith, Grey, and Haldane were the leaders. Quickly they rallied to Lord Rosebery's support and appeared on public platforms with him. A group of Liberals even younger than this faction [aside from Fowler, Asquith was the oldest, and he was not forty-five until 1897] was one to which Herbert [later Lord] Samuel adhered, and of which he wrote: "The younger group to which I belonged were all with Asquith and those associated with him. Our 'New Liberalism' embraced both the new tendencies - in imperial as well as domestic politics . . . The existence of the British Empire assured, over nearly a fourth part of the globe, internal peace and tranquillity."[1] Although Harcourt

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complain of is that he has deliberately led the public to believe that we - and I especially - refused to consult with him when as he knows and we know the refusal came from him and was persisted in against our remonstrances." [Ibid.,p.418] Attacks on Rosebery had been frequent from such Radical organs as the Daily Chronicle, but it is hard not to concur with Harcourt that Rosebery's opposition to giving a positive lead [particularly in view of a memorandum of his to that effect drawn up less than two months before] was a chief cause of his resignation, and that the remaining cause was due to a desire to "plough the lonely furrow" devoid of party responsibilities.

1. Samuel, [Sir] Herbert [Lord]: Memoirs, London, 1945, p. 33.

was, as Liberal leader in the House of Commons, the only approach to an official leader which the party possessed, and though he had the support of the mass of Liberal sentiment not only in the country but also at Westminster, the future clearly lay with the group which was Imperialist in foreign affairs, vaguely collectivist at home. We shall enquire later into the significance of the intellectual ascendancy of this group.

Late in December, 1895, began the series of events which were to lead, four years later, to the Boer War. The causes of this war, of course, lay in history even further back than Majuba /1881/, but they had been aggravated by the finding of gold in the Transvaal and the consequent rush of Uitlanders /or Outlanders/, mainly British, to Johannesburg and the Rand. Determined to maintain their hard-won independence and isolated in a sea of British colonies, the Boers were as intransigeant as the power-crazed Rhodes. "Oom Paul" Kruger, their leader and President, bargained stubbornly over the question of Uitlander grievances and refused to give way. There is evidence to show not only that Rhodes was planning, with Chamberlain's knowledge and connivance, a rising in Johannesburg, but that this rising was scheduled to take place early in 1896. Unfortunately for the schemers' chances of success, however, Dr. Jameson, one of Rhodes' leading aides, was permitted to act for himself, and on December 29, 1895, he led an expedition of about 600 men across the Transvaal border with the apparent intention of "liberating" Johannesburg from the Boers. This

ill-thought-out and ill-timed expedition collapsed within a week, and in an unusual outburst of generosity the Boer authorities handed Jameson and his co-raiders over to the British officials. Something of the atmosphere in Britain, especially in London, was revealed in their arrival. The ringleaders were brought back to London via a circuitous and secret route so that no one should know when and where they had arrived. On February 23, 1896, the men were taken to be arraigned at Bow Street. The Annual Register commented: "Although every effort had been made to keep their arrival secret, large crowds assembled both in the police court and in the neighbouring streets, and their appearance was greeted with wild enthusiasm."[1] Asquith, who was not one of Jameson's supporters, wrote that he and his colleagues "were, on their arrival in England, acclaimed and feted by a section of London society as the worthy successors of Drake and Raleigh."[2] The sentences pronounced upon the men were extremely light, Jameson's being imprisonment for fifteen months, while the other leaders were sentenced for from five to ten months.

It was the aftermath of the Jameson Raid, however, which caused the Liberal Party its most severe trouble in the episode. Late in 1896, after the raiders had been tried and sentenced, a Select Committee of the House of Commons was set up to consider the Raid, its causes, effects, and implications. Included among its members were Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman

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1. Annual Register, 1896, p. 49.
2. Asquith, op. cit., vol. I, p. 253.

among Liberal leaders, Labouchere representing the Radical Little Englanders, Sydney Buxton, an Irish Nationalist, and the Colonial Secretary himself. The Committee sat for five months in 1897, from February to July, while a vast number of witnesses and papers paraded across the scene, to the amusement, interest, or boredom of London Society. It was widely felt at the time that the proceedings of the Committee were not as open and revealing as they should have been; for example, Hawksley, the solicitor for Rhodes' Chartered Company of South Africa, refused to produce many possibly incriminating telegrams, and was not compelled to do so. J. A. Spender, an eye-witness, wrote that the Committee "was from beginning to end a disaster. It worked in an atmosphere of patriotic fervour, anti-German wrath and extreme personal bitterness, which was highly unfavourable to the doing of justice . . . To this day I cannot think of that Committee without feeling once again something of the bewilderment and exasperation which its proceedings caused in me, and the hopelessness of my effort to give sense and sequence to what took place. Witnesses were whisked out of the box just when their evidence seemed to be becoming important; the public sittings were suddenly suspended when the scent seemed to be getting warm; and, when the curtain was raised again, an entirely different branch of the inquiry was found to have been taken up. All the witnesses seemed willing to wound and yet afraid to strike; and the Committee itself habitually to accept the most

far-fetched explanations of incidents of which the simple construction was under its nose."[1]

The report of the Committee was presented in July, 1897, and perplexed the public, especially those Liberals who had relied upon their leaders to find the truth. The Jameson Raid was condemned, unqualifiedly, Rhodes was found guilty of "grave breaches of duty", but Chamberlain was accused of nothing and none of the basic reasons for the Raid or who had sponsored it were discovered. The true role of Rhodes and his connections with Chamberlain equally lay hidden. A Radical group of "Liberal Forwards" had been formed, "despite," Maccoby says, "every official type of discouragement, and discourtesy," and as it "organised to make trouble, a debating opportunity had to be allowed on July 26th. But even the 'Liberal Forwards' were too intimidated to make trouble effectively . . ."[2] Chamberlain took part next day in the debate, and to the consternation of Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman, who had helped to write the majority report of the Committee [only Labouchere dissented from the majority and issued a separate report] spoke in glowing terms of Cecil Rhodes. Indiscretions the Colonial Secretary readily admitted but no action had been taken by Rhodes, Chamberlain maintained, sufficient to besmirch his name as a man of honour, much less to have his Privy Councillorship withdrawn. In so saying, eye witnesses reported,

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1. Spender, J.A.: <u>Life, Journalism, and Politics</u>, vol. 1, New York, 1927, pp. 81-2.
2. Maccoby, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 247-8.

the quondam Radical looked meaningfully and menacingly at Sir Charles Dilke, who had remained a P.C. despite his divorce case. This eulogy of Rhodes put the Liberal leaders in an extremely invidious position; associated with Chamberlain on the Committee and having already spoken in the debate, they felt themselves helpless to reply or to dissociate themselves from the Colonial Secretary's speech. Spender writes: "Liberals . . . blamed their spokesmen, and especially Sir William Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman for having failed to break through what they considered to be a conspiracy of silence. . . Others surmised reasons of state . . ."[1] The "Liberal Forwards" pressed on to a division which they lost by 304 to 77, a division in which there were many Liberal abstentions. Maccoby comments: "For Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman to have denied themselves the important party advantages which the Committee might have yielded them is almost clear proof that certain outside influences were at work." Morley had supported Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman over the affair, and it left Liberalism in a very strange position, having lost an opportunity and being associated with the dirtiest aspects of Imperialism without the "glory" of having been responsible for the romantic and popular aspects of the Raid. "That normally stiff Radical organs should have maintained an embarrassed coolness towards the "Liberal Forward" and sighed with relief

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1. Spender, J. A.: Life of Campbell-Bannerman, vol. 1, p. 196.

when the whole business was over, only adds to the strangeness of a situation that further strengthened Chamberlain's hand . . ."[1] The peculiarities of the situation were underscored a few months later, when a writer in the Fortnightly Review commented: "The most decorous of Whigs scarcely could have wished the Liberal leaders of Westminster to temper their attitude towards Ministers in all foreign and many domestic matters, by more chivalrous self-denial than, in the manner of the South African Committee, Sir William Harcourt, as one now knows, with the approval of Mr. John Morley, persistently displayed."[2] Speaking on July 29, 1897, Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, commented that the Liberals on the Committee "sought no party ends, and they declined to push the Enquiry to a point which would endanger the supremacy of the British Rule in South Africa."[3]

Since the Raid much evidence has been produced to show that some of the Liberal leaders had known of Rhodes' plans and even helped to bring them to fruition. Thus a recent writer explains: "An exposure of Chamberlain's part in the plot would almost certainly have brought to light the complicity of Lord Rosmead, who had been appointed at Rhodes' request by the Liberal Government of 1895. But it may also have brought to knowledge something much more serious - Lord Rosebery's knowledge and approval of the Rhodes plan when he was Prime Minister.

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1. Maccoby, op. cit., p. 247, p. 248.
2. Fortnightly Review, vol. 63, p. 16, January, 1898.
3. Van der Poel, Jean: The Jameson Raid, London, 1951, p. 232.

Such a disclosure would have been a shattering blow to the Liberal Party . . . . Hans Sauer, in the capacity of pseudo-Secretary, was with Rhodes during his examination by the Committee. He, like other observers . . . could not understand why the Liberals did not press home the attack and asked Rhodes for an explanation. Rhodes said: 'They dare not do it; we also have a cat in the bag which, if we let it out, would show that one of their big men knew all about it.' The big man, Rhodes told Sauer, was Rosebery."[1] Although the true reasons for the remarkable Liberal weakness and the exact extent of Chamberlain's implication in the Raid were unknown at the time, speculation was rife in many quarters and the Liberals suffered severely in public estimation.

The Liberals further revealed their divisions and inability to act effectively in 1897 and 1898 during times of trouble in Crete and China. In the former, Greek attempts to annex Crete met with much Radical support, but this was isolated and entirely ineffectual, and when in 1898 a British fleet bombed the Turkish Customs House at Candia the party was again divided as to what action to pursue. In China, German and Russian aggression met with another mixed response as did the retaliatory action taken by the British Government. Clearly as the months passed the Liberals were growing less, not more, united. Rosebery, like Gladstone "mistaking St. Helena for

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1. Ibid., p. 233. For a full study of the Jameson Raid and the Liberal implication therein, see Van Der Poel, op. cit., specially Chapters 2 and 8; also see Halevy, op. cit., p. 30n., and Appendix V to this thesis.

Elba", was encouraging the super-patriotism of Imperialism, while the Little Englanders viewed with ever greater alarm the current trends.

In 1896 the Government had authorised an advance from Egypt by British and Egyptian troops into the Sudan as far as Dongola, led by Sir Herbert [later Lord] Kitchener. This action was opposed at the time by Labouchere and Dilke for the Radicals and they were supported in a censure motion by Harcourt and Morley. Many Liberals strongly objected to the Radical action and the motion of course failed in any event; the expedition went forward. Dongola was taken and passed and the expedition continued into the southern Sudan. As 1898 began the country had virtually forgotten about domestic politics. Great Britain stood isolated from the other Great Powers and the atmosphere of approaching war seemed ever thicker. The Annual Register wrote that the "political atmosphere was so charged with electricity that it seemed possible for war or revolution to break out at the flimsiest pretext."[1] Under such circumstances attention was riveted to the progress of Lord Kitchener, excitement rising as he proceeded further south, and culminating on September 2, 1898, in the battle of Omdurman. The Khalifa's army, forty thousand strong, attacked Kitchener's troops and were repulsed with heavy losses. Then the British and Egyptians attacked and by the end of the day

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1. Annual Register, 1898, p. 1.

the Dervishes had lost 10,000 men, besides another 10,000 wounded and 5,000 captured. Kitchener's men suffered fewer than 500 casualties. A terrible massacre followed, along with the desecration of the tomb of the Mahdi. But the British public judged that Gordon had been avenged; the outcry of praise and self-adulation in the British Press was unprecedented. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt wrote in his diary: "The whole country, if one may judge by the Press, has gone mad with the lust of fighting glory . . ."[1] Rosebery [among other Liberals] gloated over the victory and said that a duty had been discharged which had weighed very heavily on the national heart since the "massacre of Gordon" in 1885.[2] Sir Edward Grey said that the Sudan had once again been brought into communication with the outside world and now could know what justice and good government were.[3]

Kitchener then advanced to Khartoum and followed this up by continuing still further south to Fashoda, where on September 19 he encountered the French Major Marchand who, with 120 Senegalese troops, was claiming the area for France. The situation was tense for days while negotiations were carried on between London and Paris. Since the Grey warning in 1895 the British Government had regarded all of the Sudan as a "sphere of influence", but the French were equally determined

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1. Maccoby, *op. cit.*, p. 262n.

2. *Annual Register*, 1898, p. 155.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 156

to gain some ground in Africa, particularly after the 750,000 square miles which the Kitchener expedition had added to British territory, dispelling finally the notion that the British occupation of Egypt was only a temporary and unwanted step. After a considerable period of tenseness and jingoism in Great Britain the French finally submitted and the demand "Marchand, marchez" was carried out. Blunt wrote: "All parties, Tories, Whigs, Radicals, Churchmen, and Nonconformists, have joined in publicly extolling English virtue and denouncing the French."[1] Meanwhile Kitchener was now on his way home, where he was met not only with a peerage but with a great popular response. Arriving on October 27, 1898, the hero "was received," the Annual Register said, "with immense enthusiasm both at [Dover] and at Victoria Station . . . There ensued a succession of entertainments, official banquets, civic ceremonies, and popular demonstrations."[2] Only a few Radical politicians and journals [such as the Daily News and the Manchester Guardian] resisted the general trend.

The display of popular enthusiasm over the Imperial victories had thus reached a peak late in 1898. The Little Englandish leaders of the Liberal Party, Morley and Harcourt, felt themselves increasingly isolated from the mass of sentiment in the party and in the country, and Harcourt as House of Commons

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1. Blunt, W. S.: My Diaries, one volume edition, London, 1932, p. 298.

2. Annual Register, 1898, p. 170.

leader felt especially bitterly the intrigues on behalf of Lord Rosebery and the influence of the Liberal Imperialist group. Articles in the newspapers and in the weekly and monthly journals abounded, favouring Rosebery's re-assumption of the party leadership and supporting his Imperial policies. Rosebery himself encouraged this situation by Jingoist speeches at the time of the Fashoda crisis. This trend of circumstances caused great anxiety to Harcourt and Morley, and finally the breaking point was reached [or, so it was popularly assumed] when, early in December, Sir Edward Grey made an unauthorised speech on foreign affairs which was gravely displeasing to the older leaders. In this speech [at Blackburn on December 2] Grey said "with regard to our position in Egypt . . . that the grand work we were doing there created an obligation on our part to the Egyptian people to see that it should be continued; and that that would keep us in Egypt."[1] Harcourt among the older leaders strongly deprecated the Kitchener expedition which the Liberal Imperialists hailed, and still wished British evacuation of Egpyt. Shortly before, Rosebery had delivered a speech in which he said he had been "ministerially and <u>personally</u> responsible" for Grey's 1895 speech warning the French away from Africa, thus bringing again to the fore an issue which still rankled in Harcourt's mind. In any event, "after much discussion between us,"[2] Morley wrote, Harcourt

1. <u>Annual Register</u>, 1898, p. 185.
2. Morley, <u>Recollections</u>, vol. 2, p. 82.

determined to resign, the resignation taking the form of a letter to the former Irish Secretary, dated December 8,1898. In it Harcourt wrote: "A party rent by sectional disputes and personal interests is one which no man can consent to lead either with credit to himself or advantage to the country."[1] He concluded: "I am not, and I shall not consent to be, a candidate for any contested position. I will be no party to such a degradation in the tone of public life in this country . . . If I have arrived at the conclusion that I can best discharge my duty in an independent position in the House of Commons, you will, I feel sure, agree that a disputed leadership, beset by distracted sections and conflicting interests is an impossible situation, and a release from vain and onerous obligations will come to me as a welcome relief."[2] Replying, Morley wrote that it had been an almost impossible task to lead the Liberal Party in the House of Commons after the great defeat of 1895. He left no doubt that he was entirely in agreement with Sir William as to the political differences, want of support, and intrigues, which had marked the latter's leadership since 1895. Years later, Lord Morley wrote: "The *Times*/imputed/ the alleged want of loyal party support to what they called our 'crude, unpopular, and anti-national ideas' and to 'profound divergences of policy, aim, and temper in external affairs'. This, let me say, was with

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1. Gardiner, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 473.
2. *Annual Register*, 1898, p. 191.

the usual discount for bad language by no means wide of the mark."[1]

The Harcourt resignation, coming as it did with the express and explicit support of Morley, caused surprise, severe confusion, almost chaos, within the Liberal ranks. Two Liberal leaders had resigned within a little over two years, alleging want of support, while in the country Liberal opinion from all factions severely condemned Harcourt and Morley for abandoning the fight. Significantly, however, the Annual Register wrote of Harcourt's charges of party division: "Hardly any attempt was made to repudiate or disprove so grave an allegation."[2] On December 16, two days after the resignation was made public, Asquith made an important speech at Birmingham where the National Liberal Federation was meeting. Deploring Harcourt's resignation he nonetheless refused to retract an inch from a frankly Imperialist position and avowed that where Great Britain occupied foreign territory it was in the interests of the foreign population: "not upon brute force . . . but upon the work which we do, upon the benefits which we confer . . . "[3]

Thus as the New Year broke the Liberal Party was in a

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1. Morley: Recollections, vol. 2, p. 84.

2. Annual Register, 1898, p. 193.

3. Ibid., p. 196.

worse position than ever before. Leaderless and with no fixed Imperial programme it faced a relatively united Unionist Government. Things soon went from worse to still worse. Speaking to his constituents at Brechin on January 17, 1899, Morley said that he had thus far preserved a "grim and stony silence" but that he must now at last speak out. Grey and Asquith had just made speeches denouncing the Little Englanders, particularly with regard to the Sudan, and Morley replied, bitterly condemning the new trend, identifying Liberal with Unionist Imperialism, and saying that the party must cling to its old watchwords of "peace, economy, and reform." He went on: "I will not go about the country saying fine things or listening to fine things about Mr. Gladstone, and at the same time sponging off the slate all the lessons that Mr. Gladstone taught us and all the lessons that he set."[1] He concluded by saying that he "asked leave of his constituents no longer to take an active and responsible part in the formal councils of the heads of the Liberal Party."[2]

Now the break was even more complete and the party was left not only leaderless but without any figure of national status or of long experience in leadership. Rosebery, Harcourt, Morley - the three leading supporters of Mr. Gladstone in the long years in the wilderness after 1886 and in the 1892-94 Government were now gone, though they remained politically alive

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1. Gardiner, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 479.
2. Spender: Life of Campbell-Bannerman, vol. 1, p. 209.

enough to criticise and further divide the party from without. Only four ex-Cabinet Ministers were left upon the Front Bench; Asquith was still young, but with a fashionable wife and limited means he was forced to spend half his time at the Bar to earn his livelihood. He was, apparently, offered the leadership by the Liberal Whips, but was unwilling to take it. Bryce was immersed in his historical studies and neither he nor Fowler possessed the stature of leadership. This left only Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the sole member of the quartet who had been in the Government of 1886. Despite the above factors, few Liberals thought that Sir Henry would accept the leadership, and most experts expected either that Lord Rosebery would resume command or that Asquith would be induced to accept for the party's sake. But at a party meeting on February 6, 1899, Sir Henry was duly proposed amid an appearance of party unity and duly accepted. The new leader was chosen, the papers said, unanimously, as a stop-gap, while waiting for the resumption of Lord Rosebery, or because he divided the party least. He had supported what was on the whole a Roseberyite foreign policy, he had, unlike Morley and Harcourt, approved of the Sudan expedition and the British action over Fashoda. Campbell-Bannerman had thus the advantage of acquiescing in most of the Imperial adventures, hence presenting something of a positive approach to foreign affairs, for the Little Englanders, while willing to criticise and appeal to the principles of Gladstone seemed unable to suggest

any alternative policies in Africa, Asia, or in Europe, where Chamberlain was now seeking a German alliance. But if the new leader was no Little Englander, he had not the support of the forward elements among the Liberal Imperialists either. Made leader to conciliate and reconcile, Sir Henry found himself in so intermediate a position that, while he could mediate reasonably successfully in time of peace, when war came he could do nothing to preserve what was left of party unity.

For war was in the offing and was to come before the year was out. The Liberal Party, it is quite possible, might have done something to have prevented it had it possessed any form of unity, but a meeting of the party held in January at the National Liberal Club to discuss future policy was unhappily typical of its proceedings. No two people who spoke agreed, the Annual Register said, about future imperial policy. "The meeting, as might be anticipated, arrived at no practical results, and outsiders asked how in the face of such divergence of opinion the Liberal Party could be reconstituted before the next General Election."[1] On May 5 Lord Rosebery made a speech at the City Liberal Club the reverberations of which were long to echo. In the speech Rosebery condemned the Liberal Party in Parliament "as a thing utterly apathetic and contemptible."[2] He said that perhaps the time was now ripe for a new national party of Imperialists, apparently to incorporate the former

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1. Annual Register, 1899, p. 7.
2. Spectator, vol. 82, May 13, 1899, p. 669.

Liberal Unionists and the new Liberal Imperialists [though this was explained away by Rosebery's supporters], and failing that acceptance must be made by the whole Liberal Party of "the larger patriotism that I have called Imperialism."[1] Morley and several other Liberals in the House of Commons were at this time opposing the prospected grant of £700 a year to Lord Kitchener for his services in the 1896-1898 expedition in the Sudan. On this point Rosebery said: "If it be true that there is an intention in the House of Commons to oppose a vote for a pittance of £700 a year or so to a gallant soldier to support the coronet which he has won on the field of battle,[2] I should say that that, too, was an imperfect way of promoting Imperial interests. But that I do not believe, because it seems to me so wholly incredible."[3] The Spectator commented immediately afterwards: "Whatever his motive in making it, a speech more calculated to injure the Liberal Party can hardly be imagined . . . . It is difficult to find any motive for Lord Rosebery's amazing speech at the City Liberal Club, unless it was the desire to create the maximum of distraction in the Liberal Party."[4] Nonetheless an attempt was made to stop

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1. Annual Register, 1899, p. 106.

2. It will be remembered that a few years before Charles Booth had estimated that a third of the people of London were living below the "poverty line" of 30s. a week, or £78 a year.

3. Spectator, vol. 82, May 13, 1899, p. 666.

4. Ibid., p. 669.

the grant to Lord Kitchener, an attempt which Morley strongly supported but which Campbell-Bannerman as strongly opposed. The anti-grant motion was defeated by 393 to 51. The day after the Rosebery speech Harcourt replied in a savage attack, saying that "Mr. Gladstone's ashes were hardly cold before they were advised to wipe out the whole of the inheritance which he had left the Liberals."[1]

Even before the war the split was an open and admitted one. Writing in the Contemporary Review in June, 1899, Robert Wallace, the Radical M.P., said: "The Liberal Party took up the cause of the oppressed masses . . . . A man, they said, was sacred; he had primordial rights which must be respected at whatever cost. Even a negro had a right to freedom and property . . . . But all that is changed now. The Liberal Imperialist holds that man as man has no rights if he is in another country, and is weaker than ourselves, and has anything which the Liberal Imperialist can put in his imperialist but not Liberal pocket."[2]

In October the climax came with the advent of the South African War. The tension which had been slightly relaxed after the failure of the Jameson Raid and the cessation of Rhodes' Premiership of Cape Colony had been built up again over the past year to the point of climax. J. A. Hobson visited South Africa shortly before the war and wrote later:

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1. Annual Register, 1899, p. 106.

2. Contemporary Review, vol. 75, June, 1899, p. 792.

"The lesson I learned from this experience was the dominant power of a particularly crude form of capitalism operating in a mixed political field. It became evident that, while the politicians were hesitant and divided, the capitalists of the Rand were planning straight for war and were using the British Press of South Africa as their instrument for rousing the war-spirit on England. Though the large number of interested English investors in South African mines formed the nucleus of their appeal, they were well aware that England would need to visualise the war in terms of morals and humanity. So for some months their Press was turned upon outrages upon Outlanders in Johannesburg, while missionary opinion was mobilised to denounce the cruelties practised by the Boers upon the native population in South Africa. The diplomatic story of Outlander grievances, foisted on our public from diplomatic sources, was wildly exaggerated."[1]

The grievances of the Uitlanders centred around the fact that they paid most of the taxes in the Transvaal but had no right of franchise, a point which Sir Alfred [later Lord] Milner was quick to seize upon and capitalise to maximum advantage. Moreover, he and other Imperialists pointed out, the Negroes in the Transvaal were treated as inferiors, in marked contrast to the "liberalism" of Cape Colony. Demands were made for a five-year residence period of franchise qualification, while the stubborn Kruger held out for first nine, then seven years. Negotiations were carried out and

1. Hobson, J. A.: Confessions of an Economic Heretic, London, 1938, pp. 61-2.

Chamberlain excited home opinion by Jingoism of the most vulgar type. In a notorious speech on August 26, 1899, he declared: "The sands are running down the glass. The situation is too fraught with danger, it is too strained for any indefinite postponement. The knot must be loosened . . . or else we shall have to find some other way of untying it."[1] Early in October, 1899, the Kruger ultimatum was enunciated, demanding that no more British troops be landed in South Africa, and was followed by an attack on British territory. The Boer war had begun, and with it the fortunes of the Liberal Party were swamped in a cloud of super-patriotism and emotionalism.

Some few Liberal voices, immediately dubbed "Pro-Boer", were heard above the din [Spender, a reliable witness of events, says that a majority of Liberals were opposed to the war at its outset]. Morley, for example, [who felt Liberals to be "either horribly timorous or flat jingo"[2]], publicly and privately denounced the war and the measures which had led up to it. But Morley was in semi-retirement, working at Hawarden on his celebrated biography of Gladstone, and in any event he had not been entirely dissociated from the demand for the Uitlander franchise, so could not be entirely consistent in his denunciations. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt wrote in his diary on September 18: "Morley had already a day or two ago at a meeting in Manchester given away the whole Liberal case

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1. Halévy, op. cit., Book 1, p. 128.
2. Gooch, G. P.: Life of Courtney, London, 1920, p. 369.

against the war, publicly approving the Franchise demands made by our Government on the Transvaal, a real red herring, which the Radicals have run to in full cry."[1] A footnote adds: "The pretext of demanding the franchise for the Uitlanders in the Transvaal was a trap laid by Milner especially for Morley and the Radicals who stepped into it precisely as planned."[2]

But the protests of the Radicals were now lost in any event. The Fowler-Asquith-Haldane-Grey faction rallied strongly to the Government, partly prompted, Campbell-Bannerman and others always believed, by the fact that Milner had been at Balliol, as had Asquith, Haldane, and Grey. The new leader had a deep mistrust of his brilliant young colleagues and it is significant that he should have attributed what he called their "Milner-worship" or the "religio Milneriana" to the Balliol tie. Writing to Lord Ripon, he said: "It is my conviction that one of the main influences causing the determined support given by them to the Government's S.A. policy has been Milner-worship."[3] At home the Liberal Imperialist group looked to Rosebery for a lead; that statesman said that he "'dated from the ultimatum [of Kruger] as Mohammedans from the Hegira,' and could think of nothing before or after."[4] In a public letter written the day war began [October 11], the

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1. Blunt, op. cit., p. 328.

2. Ibid., p. 328.

3. Spender, J. A.: Life of Campbell-Bannerman, vol. 1, p. 302.

4. Spender, J.A.: Life, Journalism, and Politics, vol. 1, p. 92.

ex-Premier urged that the nation should "close its ranks and relegate party controversy to a more convenient season."[1] This statement, a most peculiar one for a leader [retired or active] of the Opposition, met with widespread support from the Liberal Imperialists. Asquith immediately made a speech advocating whole-hearted support of the Government, in the course of which he said: "The issue . . . is simply this: has Great Britain, the paramount power of South Africa, the right to secure for her subjects in the Transvaal the same equality of treatment as is voluntarily granted to Dutch and English alike in every other part of South Africa? ..It is not with a light heart that they [i.e., "the thinking people of the country"] take up the challenge that has been thrown down, but now that it has been forced upon them they will see it through to the end."[2] Fowler wrote to Campbell-Bannerman on October 12: "Rosebery's letter and Asquith's speech, as it appears to me, define the only policy which a responsible opposition could adopt." Extremists might rant, but responsible Liberal leaders, who have been Ministers once and will again, "are bound to support the Queen's Government in defending the Empire."[3]

In Parliament the initial, and highly unpopular task of attacking the Government for having blundered into an unjust war was left principally to two of its nominal supporters, Sir

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1. Spender, J. A.: Life of Campbell-Bannerman, vol. 1, p. 248.
2. Annual Register, 1899, p. 202.
3. Spender, J. A.: Life of Campbell-Bannerman, vol. 1., p. 248.

Edward Clarke, the famous Conservative lawyer, and Leonard Courtney, a Liberal Unionist of notable independence of mind. Parliament met on October 17, a few days after the declaration of war, and when Campbell-Bannerman refused to move a censure amendment to the Queen's address, Philip Stanhope, a Radical Pro-Boer, did so. Chamberlain spoke in the debate: "When the Colonial Secretary had told his story," Courtney's biographer relates, "Sir Edward Clarke cross-examined the witness in his best forensic style, and elicited a startling confession. Chamberlain now declared that his despatch of August 28 accepted 'at least nine-tenths' of the Boer offer, and he subsequently confessed that the remaining tenth was not worth fighting for. 'Really,' exclaimed Sir Edward, 'this becomes more and more sad. It is dreadful to think of a country entering on a war, a crime against civilisation, when this sort of thing has been going on.'"[1]

Haldane and other Liberals spoke for the Government in the debate, and in the vote only 135 members could be found to support Stanhope's amendment, while 362 voted against it. Though Chamberlain's reputation had been badly battered during the debate, it was the unity of the Liberal Party which received the worst blow. Campbell-Bannerman abstained, while intimating his support for the amendment, the Harcourt-Morley faction and most of the party voted for it, while the Grey-

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1. Gooch, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 386.

Fowler-Haldane group supported the Government.

As time went on the seriousness of the split grew ever greater. Mrs. Webb wrote that the Liberal Imperialists gave full support to the war and did not question its necessity or objects. The Pro-Boers "upheld the right of the Boer Republics to complete independence, and denounced the policy and action of the Conservative Government as wicked and aggressive." The middle faction was "unable to deny the necessity of the war but dissented alike from the policy which had led up to it, and from the objects and methods by which it was being pursued."[1] Lord Rosebery felt that between Liberal Imperialist and Pro-Boer there existed "a sincere, fundamental, and incurable antagonism of principle."[2] More and more of the Press joined the Jingo side and H. W. Massingham, the leading Radical journalist of the day, lost his job as editor of the Daily Chronicle because of too-overt Pro-Boer sympathies. Even many Noncomformist leaders, such as Dr. Clifford [Baptist] Hugh Price Hughes [Methodist], and Robert Horton [Congregationalist], supported the War. The country began to be whipped up into a frenzy which could not but be disastrous to the standing of the Liberal Party.

Soon after the outbreak of war [on October 27, 1899] a see p. 465 by-election was held in the East End constituency of Bow and Bromley. Maccoby records "a sensational fall in the Opposition poll and enthusiastic singing of 'Rule, Britannia'

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1. Webb, Beatrice: Our Partnership, pp. 191-2.
2. Fyfe, Hamilton: The British Liberal Party, London, 1928, p. 157.

and 'God Save the Queen' to greet a Conservative return double the votes scored by the Liberal."[1] The position of Campbell-Bannerman was a delicate one and he succeeded in pleasing no one. At first he attempted to conciliate the Imperialist wing of the party but was unsuccessful. Then he veered more towards the Radical wing, until in June, 1901, he made his famous speech condemning "methods of barbarism" in South Africa. But if he pleased the mass of ordinary Liberals more by Pro-Boer sentiments than by trying to woo Liberal Imperialism, the leader was continually vacillating and even when he did try to give a clear lead he succeeded only in widening the division. His biographer writes of the situation at the end of 1899: "It was evident by this time that the Liberal Party was deeply divided, and that its leaders were, without mentioning names, aiming a large part of their speeches at each other. If Campbell-Bannerman attacked Sir Alfred Milner, Mr. Haldane and Sir Edward Grey came immediately to his defence; if he said that he disbelieved in 'the great Dutch conspiracy', another of his colleagues produced a formidable array of facts to prove belief in it to be credible and plausible. All had uncontrollable consciences; Imperialists and Pro-Boers each pleaded in turn that the excesses or indiscretions of the other made it imperative to break silence."[2] Each side felt that it

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1. Maccoby, op. cit., pp. 285-6.

2. Spender, J. A.: Life of Campbell-Bannerman, vol. 1, p. 259.

was a matter of conscience to make its position known and this over-conscientiousness threatened to ruin the party. The situation was emphasised publicly when, in March, 1900, Sir Edward Grey substituted for Campbell-Bannerman at the N.L.F. annual conference and delivered a speech offensive to the moderates and Pro-Boers, some of whom suggested that Grey had been pushed forward at Campbell-Bannerman's expense, an untrue allegation, as the leader was ill. Grey upheld the need for the war, for "Imperial control" of the Boer Republics, and said that "wherever Lord Roberts passed as victor his object was to leave not only peace but confidence behind him,"[1] a curious statement in view of the barn-burning and other outrages which the war brought to South Africa. He said as well: "I think those who hold that this country is not entirely blameless for this war speak their minds strongly. I am not surprised. But let them bear in mind that if they feel called upon to speak strongly, no less do people feel called upon to speak strongly when they feel that their country is in the right."[2]

Other divisions proved as disastrous as the one held in October, 1899. In February, 1900, for example, a moderate amendment of censure was moved to the Queen's speech. Campbell-Bannerman abstained while the party divided around him

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1. Annual Register, 1900, p. 95.

2. Reports of the National Liberal Federation, 1900, p. 100.

on both sides. His biographer comments: "At the end of the first week it was evident that the division of the Liberal Party went to the root of the main issue before the country and that, however much the Government might be discredited by the course of events in South Africa, it was safe from challenge by its Parliamentary opponents."[1] In July Guinness Rogers, the veteran Nonconformist leader wrote: "It was hoped that the unanimous selection of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as leader in the Commons would have done something to promote united and energetic action . . . . I was talking recently with a friend who is one of his most loyal supporters, and who, nevertheless, felt that he sometimes shrank from challenging a division even when a defeat would have been preferable to silent acquiescence in the will of the Ministry. But on asking another equally experienced member of the House his view on this point, his reply was that all these indications of weakness were due to the leader's knowledge of the divisions in his own ranks, and even on the Front Bench. Under such conditions leadership becomes simply impossible."[2] This opinion was emphasised by a crisis which arose less than a month later. Sir Wilfrid Lawson, one of the leading Pro-Boers, introduced into the House of Commons a motion to reduce the salary of the Colonial Secretary. In the vote, on July 26, the party split three ways almost evenly, forty Liberals voting with the Government,

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1. Spender, J. A.: <u>Life of Campbell-Bannerman</u>, vol. 1, p. 275.
2. <u>Nineteenth Century</u>, vol. 48, July, 1900, p. 151.

thirty-one with Sir Wilfrid Lawson, and thirty-five abstaining with Campbell-Bannerman. Writing after the vote, the Annual Register estimated that 62 Liberal M.P.'s could be classed as Imperialists, 68 as Pro-Boers, 30 "on the fence" with Campbell-Bannerman and the new Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, while 27 were undecided or drifters. Haldane, ever the intriguer, wrote to Lord Rosebery immediately after the vote: "The party is not likely to agree on any leader in the House. Grey and I think there will be two sections now . . . If you chose to emerge and lead those Liberals who may be called 'Lord R's friends,' with Asquith and Grey as lieutenants in the House, I think things will work out. Of course a mere section cannot hope to win at the next election. But . . . we have the machinery and the whips and the future . . . . This seems a good chance for the purgation of the party."[1] This plan fell through, due to Rosebery's reluctance to emerge from his semi-retirement, but the letter is revealing of Liberal troubles at the time. As Gooch observes, this situation was "a virtual invitation to the Government to spring a Khaki election on the country at the earliest opportunity."[2]

Joseph Chamberlain was not the man to reject so evident and promising an invitation. On September 18 Parliament was dissolved and there followed perhaps as shameful an election campaign as has been known to British political history.

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1. Maurice, Maj.-Gen. Sir Frederick, Life of Haldane, vol. 1, p. 106.
2. Gooch, op. cit., p. 409.

Chamberlain was the dominant figure and the election was in a sense almost a personal referendum over the rectitude of the popular "Joe"... Nothing was too crude a device to use. Following the display of mass hysteria known as "mafficking" which had been the nation's answer to the relief of the siege of Mafeking, emotionalism was in the greatest vogue. Chamberlain sent a telegram to a Unionist candidate announcing that "every vote given to a Liberal is a vote given to the Boers", a message which an enthusiastic telegraph operator promptly changed to "sold to the Boers". J. A. Spender wrote, a month later: "The 'Radical traitor' leaflet circulated by millions. Eminent Liberals were represented on posters as offering tributes to President Kruger, helping him to shoot British soldiers, and to haul down the Union Jack. Mr. Rose, in the Newmarket Division, was pictured in the latter position, though he had lost two sons in the war, and was visiting their graves in South Africa when the election was taking place. Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener were boldly annexed by the same audacious electioneers . . . in spite of the fact that Lord Roberts had thought fit to cable from South Africa that he held entirely aloof from politics."[1] Although the war had yet well over a year to run, Unionists proclaimed that it had ended and reaped the glory of military success. "From beginning to end," Spender wrote, "the whole business has been a childish degradation of serious politics."[2]

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1. Contemporary Review, vol. 78, November, 1900, p. 745.
2. Ibid., p. 752.

The official Liberal Party leaders had tried hard to close ranks before the election but with small success. On the day of the dissolution, Herbert Gladstone delivered a speech at Leeds, "in which he made no concealment of his full belief that, under all the conditions, it was impossible for the Liberals to expect anything but defeat at the General Election. He went so far as to say that the Liberals were not then in a position to form a Government capable of retaining power, even if by some strange and wholly unexpected chance they were to come out of the election with a majority over the Conservatives."[1] The enunciation of such a speech was to invite an even worse defeat than would otherwise have befallen the party. Early in 1900 an Imperial Liberal Council had been formed, a foreshadowing of the Liberal League founded early in the new century. Lord Brassey became its chairman and R. W. Perks, who was supposed to be close to Lord Rosebery, was another of its leaders, and while the Front Bench Liberal Imperialists did not directly join the Council they were known to support it. At the Election it issued a list of candidates whom it recommended to "patriotic voters" and declared that after the election the party ranks must be purged of Pro-Boers. This distinction made no difference to the Unionists, however; the fact that Liberals attacked one another as much and more than the Government did not help them with their opponents or with the country

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1. McCarthy, Justin: _A History of our Own Times_, vol. 6, London, ~~1897~~ 1905, pp. 106-7.

at large, to whom all Liberals appeared tarred with the same brush of anti-patriotism.

The result of the election was never in doubt. While 2,055,951 Liberal [and thus, according to Unionist propaganda, "traitor"] votes were recorded and only slightly over three hundred thousand more for the Government [2,360,852], a different picture was presented by the distribution of seats.[1] A Unionist majority of 152 in 1895 had slipped away to 130 by 1900, but was slightly increased in the election to 134. One hundred and eighty-six Liberals, composed as in the past almost exclusively of bourgeois business and professional men with a smaller number of landowners, and with 82 uncertain Irish allies returned to face 402 Unionists. In the boroughs the Liberal Party had fared even worse than in 1895, as a few more seats went to the Unionists and Government majorities were increased. Now the Unionists possessed more than three borough seats out of every four. London remained at 54 Unionists to 8 Liberals, and the majorities of the former were increased. For the first time since 1832 Scotland showed a Unionist majority, 38 to 34; Bryce wrote to Courtney soon afterwards: "Scotland has the fever almost as acutely as England. Everywhere in the Eastern constituencies from eight to twelve per cent of our voters have gone over on the war. On the west side the percentage has been larger."[2] Blunt wrote to Dillon the

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1. See Appendix I.
2. Gooch, op. cit., p. 414.

following February: "Imperialism is very contagious, and Scotch, as well as English Radicals, have been extremely perverted by it."[1] Only in Wales and in the English counties did the Liberals show gains and even there they were small; in the English counties only eight seats went uncontested to the Liberals while eighty-three went to Unionists without a fight. A writer in the Fortnightly Review pointed out in November, 1900, that for the first time in modern British politics the electorate had kept a party in power "with the renewed dictatorship of an omnipotent majority."[2] The Liberal Party "has for the first time in its history been twice excluded from office by the decision of the people."[3]

After the election there was no more Liberal unity than before, and in the House of Commons a division on the war produced the by now familiar split in the party with many Liberal Imperialists voting for the Government. An instance of the depth of the split was revealed by a letter of Haldane's to Milner in December: "The result of the Election has been, I think, to deepen the sense of the gravity of the situation in the House of Commons. You must not judge the Opposition by the speeches of Harcourt and Bryce. They do not represent the bulk or anything like the bulk of Opposition opinion."[4]

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1. Blunt, op. cit., p. 349.
2. Fortnightly Review, vol. 68, November, 1900, p. 819.
3. Ibid., p. 816.
4. Maurice, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 108-9.

On the other hand, while R. W. Perks claimed that 142 out of 186 Liberal members were "virtually Liberal Imperialists", only 56 Liberal M.P.'s had been on the list issued by the Imperial Liberal Council, and the Times estimated that only about 25 more could be relied upon to support the Government over the war. On October 19 the Council adopted a resolution declaring that Liberal Imperialists must be distinguished "from those whose opinions naturally disqualify them from controlling the action of the Imperial Parliament of a world-wide community of nations."[1] Campbell-Bannerman immediately took umbrage at this statement and in an open letter declared: "This is a time for unity . . . and not for exaggerating any individual ground of difference. In what may be styled Imperial policy there is absolute harmony among four-fifths of the Liberal Party . . ."[2] While the Pro-Boers had no majority in the party, the Liberal Imperialists were even smaller numerically, and Campbell-Bannerman probably spoke for the largest element of Liberal opinion.

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We have seen that between 1895 and 1900 the split in the Liberal Party over Imperial policy widened until by the "Khaki" election there seemed to be a far greater cleavage between Liberal Imperialist and Pro-Boer than between the nominal

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1. Annual Register, 1900, p. 211.

2. Ibid., p. 211.

party formations. Many journalists and others suggested in those years that what had informally been taking place should be recognised and that a new coalition party should be formed. For example, writing in the Nineteenth Century in January, 1899, Sidney Low argued A Case for Coalition: "With Lord Salisbury, Lord Rosebery, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Goschen, Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Kimberley, Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, Sir Edward Grey, and perhaps Mr. Asquith, acting together, a truly 'National' party could be formed - a party which could carry out as much reform and domestic legislation as any moderate man desires, and could confront the foreign complications approaching with a strength like that of Mr. Pitt's administration after 1794, when the Portland Whigs joined the Government . . . There never was a more popular combination than that of the Tories and the patriotic Whigs during the earlier portion of the great French war. The Unionist alliance suggested would be more popular still; so popular indeed that probably neither Sir William Harcourt nor Mr. John Morley would care to emerge from retirement in order to become the Fox of the remnant of the Opposition."[1] In July of the same year an unsigned article in the Fortnightly pointed out: "Lord Rosebery is more free from party spirit than any other statesman who has ever played so large a part in English politics . . . . Lord Rosebery's moral weakness and demoralising strength really come to this,

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1. Nineteenth Century, 1899, vol. 45, January, p. 17.

that he preaches to the Liberal Party in terms which are impressive, as far as they go, but would enable him, if they go no further, to become a Unionist with admirable consistency."[1] Rosebery himself gave reason for such statements; at Glasgow on November 16, 1900, for example, he said: "The development and expansion of the Empire have produced a corresponding demand for first rate men, but the supply has remained, at best, stationary. Of course we do not employ all those that we have; for by the balance of our constitution, while one half of our capable statesmen is in full work, the other half is, by that fact, standing idle in the market-place with no one to hire them. This used to be on a five years' shift, but all that is now altered. Anyhow, it is a terrible waste."[2] In mid-1899 Blunt recorded a visit "to the House of Commons for the Sudan debate which was led by Morley, ably and courageously. I heard Grey speak in good parliamentary style, but without eloquence, the Tories applauding him."[3]

The harm which such a cleavage caused to the Liberal Party was severe at a time when it could ill afford the loss of prestige and popular esteem which the split and the Boer War made inevitable. In the first place, the split itself reduced the Liberal Party to the position of a laughing-stock. Divided as it was, without a leader [or perhaps with too many],

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1. Fortnightly Review, July, 1899, vol. 66, p. 2.
2. Halévy, Élie: History of the English People, 1895-1905, London, 1929, p. 103n.
3. Blunt, op. cit., pp. 313-4.

it could speak with no clear voice and had consequently no policy which it could offer to the electorate on the crucial imperial issues of the day. One inevitable result of this situation, which perforce kept the Unionists in power at the Khaki Election, was that when the reaction came, as it was bound to do, it came in an aggravated form which severely injured the possibility of a Liberal Government's successfully enacting moderate, as opposed to radical, reforms. The pendulum, suspended in 1900, swung back with redoubled vigour in 1906.[1] In 1900 the party reached its nadir; at a time when it should have been offering constructive policies to the country it was paralysed.

Moreover, the Liberal divisions meant not only that the party was powerless to prevent a war which Professor Trevelyan has called "devoid of all pretence to moral beauty", and characteristic of "capitalism in one of its least attractive forms",[2] and which resulted in a state of mind in the British populace which revealed the new democracy at its worst and least tolerant, but which also isolated Great Britain among the European powers and constituted one of the series of sequences which were climaxed in the First World War. Writing in the Fortnightly Review in July, 1899, an anonymous writer pointed out: "Nothing that Mr. John Morley or Sir William

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1. See Appendix II.

2. Trevelyan, G. M.: Grey of Fallodon, p. 75.

Harcourt can say, will remove the fact that Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Rudyard Kipling are more influential and representative personages of the age than either of them."[1] This statement was unquestionably true, but the effect of this situation was made incomparably greater by the fact that the Liberal Party wilted before the storm of commercial-cum-romantic imperialism. Had the party stood firm as a bastion of non-imperialist opinion, had its leaders been united and given a firm lead to the latent sentiment of pacifism which found deep roots in the country, both the nation and the Liberal Party would have fared far better. Lord Samuel, then a young Liberal Imperialist, points out that the Rosebery-Grey-Asquith group was "stronger among the leaders than the rank and file . . ."[2] The Imperialists, that, is, included the most able and brilliant among the party's leaders, as well as the rising youth which the Pro-Boers lacked. Harcourt had retired and in any event lacked popular appeal, Morley was immersed in the Gladstone papers and furthermore had resolved to have little to do with rousing anti-war sentiment, Bryce was known more as a scholar than as a statesman, Labouchere was too erratic and Lloyd George too young to be of much use. Under such circumstances it is hardly surprising that Pro-Boer meetings all over the country were stormed and broken up, that Lloyd George was forced to flee from a Birmingham meeting disguised as a policeman,[3] that Sir Robert Reid was reputed to be the only leading

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1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 66, July, 1899, p. 7.
2. Samuel, op. cit., pp. 39-40.
3. See Appendix V.

Pro-Boer still received in fashionable society. With no real leadership the anti-Imperialist forces, in a majority in the party though they undoubtedly were, remained frustrated and impotent. It would have taken leadership as resolute and courageous as Gladstone's over Home Rule to buck the Imperialist tide, and as the party was weak and divided the only surprising thing was that the vote in 1900 was so close. Spence Watson, President of the National Liberal Federation, commented a few years later that "the English character for sobriety, fairness, and moderation disappeared, and culminating on Mafeking night, the wildest orgies of the most reckless semi-barbarous people were witnessed in all parts of our land . . . . The Liberal Party is not without part nor lot in the shame. If it had remained firm to the great principles of popular freedom the war might have been prevented, and even, when begun, its worst features might have been averted."[1] It is indeed highly likely that had the Government faced the united and determined opposition of almost 200 Liberal M.P.'s plus that of a few independent Unionists like Courtney and Clarke and the Irish, the war could have been averted, for a democratic nation can hardly conduct a foreign war to which a large and articulate section of the population is averse. Instead, the opposition to the war was scattered and ineffective, and what was perhaps the most precious Liberal inheritance and asset, the

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1. Watson, R. S.: The National Liberal Federation, London, 1907, p. 242.

Gladstonian concept of liberalism, peace, and non-intervention abroad, was shattered. Blunt noted in his diary on January 10, 1900: "There is a letter in the Times just come which I think caps everything yet written for absurd bombast. Its author is old Reid, the naval constructor, a former Gladstonian Radical, and still M.P. It shows to what a pass of self-glorification we English have come, for the Radicals are now worse than the extremest Tories . . ."[1] Spence Watson, a staunch Gladstonian, wrote mournfully and reflectively: "To those who were opposed to the war the situation was often terrible. Everything which they had been striving for throughout their lives, every step which seemed to have been gained, every victory won, apparently with the concurrence of the entire Liberal Party, appeared to have been thrown away."[2]

The most serious consequence to the party, however, of the Liberal split over the Imperial policies which culminated in the South African war was not the lack of a policy which meant electoral defeat or even the inability to stop the war or moderate public sentiment. It lay in the fact that at a time when Liberalism had its last real opportunity to conciliate working class opinion and show itself the true friend of Labour it grievously failed to seize its opportunity. The

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1. Blunt, op. cit., p. 344.

2. Watson, op. cit., p. 244.

Pro-Boer cause was, as we have seen, even more unpopular than the advocacy of Home Rule had been, for Home Rule had at least had a certain amount of support from the working classes, while advocacy of the independence of the Boer Republics met with much hostility and opprobrium from vociferous sections of working-class opinion. In London the working classes were specially Imperialist in sentiment. Beneath the surface appearance of Jingoism, however, leading working-class opinion was deeply pacifist. John Burns may have talked of the necessity of expansion in 1898, but soon after he was asserting vehement Pro-Boer sentiments. Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, and the I.L.P. were strongly opposed to the war; as Lord Elton points out: "For the I.L.P. the war was but one more, particularly glaring, illustration of the socialist theory that all wars are promoted by Capitalists in order to obtain profit."[1] Five months before its beginning the I.L.P. had issued a manifesto denouncing the "criminal conduct of the Government . . ."[2] The same working-class groups which were most roused to the need for social legislation of a far-reaching character were the groups most opposed to the Boer War. Even much non-Socialist trade-union opinion was Pro-Boer, however. As Halévy comments: ". . .Among the secretaries of the Unions, who were often devout Nonconformists, sometimes lay preachers, the vast majority -

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1. Elton, Godfrey [Lord]: Life of MacDonald, London, 1939, p. 91.

2. Ibid., p. 91.

whether they had been converted to Socialism or were still opposed to the novel creed - remained loyal to the traditional humanitariansim of the Gladstonians."[1] Henry Pelling writes: "It should be remembered that even at the end of the century the great majority of trade union leaders were members of the Liberal Party, and Gladstonians at that. The outbreak of the South African war in October, 1899, and the collapse of an effective Liberal opposition came as a great shock to them. They could not agree with the Liberal Imperialists, and they found themselves drawn to the same conclusions as the Socialists, that the war had been brought about by unscrupulous financial interests. Even before the declaration of war, Reynolds News, the great working-class newspaper which had formerly given a critical support to the Liberals, came out in favour of the formation of a new party; many of the members of the Liberal Party, it declared, were 'like Tories', and bogus company promoters were in control of politics."[2]

The issue was complicated by the fact that intellectual Socialists were divided but that the Webbs and Shaw, who were the leading figures of the Fabian Society, supported and consorted with the Liberal Imperialists. In a pamphlet Shaw wrote that "a Great Power consciously or unconsciously must govern in the interests of mankind as a whole; and it is not

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1. Halévy, op. cit., 1939 edition, Book 3, p. 170.

2. Pelling, Henry: The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900, London, 1954. pp. 218-19.

to these interests that such mighty forces as gold-fields, and the formidable armaments that can be built upon them, should be wielded irresponsibly by small communities of frontiersmen."[1] In a speech in February, 1900, he asserted: "The world is to the big and powerful states by necessity."[2] Shaw also believed that a British Transvaal would end Kruger's reactionary race policies and give votes to the Negroes. Webb intrigued with the Liberal Imperialists and tried to "permeate" them with Fabian ideology while he left the Pro-Boers alone. This meant that advanced Labour opinion, separated from the Fabians and Liberal Imperialists alike, was forced to fall back on the Radical Little Englanders as allies, with the result that the most powerful element of Liberals was alienated from most of the groups which formed the Labour Representation Committee, in February, 1900. Even more important, it meant that many non-Socialist trade unionists, drawing close to the Socialists on the war issue, lost their faith in the Liberal Party.[3]

It has often been said that the Radical Pro-Boers were the "Left" of the Liberal Party while the Liberal Imperialists were on its Right. Ensor, for example, maintains: "Essentially, the Roseberyites were the Whigs and the anti-Roseberyites the Radicals, and the future lay with the Radicals."[4] To state this, however, is badly to distort the truth. For who

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1. Elton, op. cit., p. 92.
2. Hutchison, Keith: The Decline and Fall of British Capitalism, New York, 1950, p. 39.
3. See Appendix V, also Appendix IV.
4. Ensor, R. C. K., in Cole, Margaret [ed.]: The Webbs and Their Work, London, 1949, p. 66.

were the leaders of the 'Radicals'? Harcourt and Morley, who had been despaired of by Liberal collectivists and Socialists alike for years as supporters of doctrinaire Manchesterism, were the two predominant figures. Morley might say, as he did say in an Oxford speech in June, 1900: ". . . If I were unfortunately called upon to choose between the Socialist and the Militarist, with all his disregard for the rights and feelings of other people, I declare to you that I consider the Socialist's standards are higher and his aims not any more unwise."[1] This piece of rhetoric did not change Morley from being the dogmatic opponent of Eight Hours. Labouchere and Sir Wilfrid Lawson were two other leading Pro-Boers, but their Radicalism was mild and mainly political, certainly passé by 1900 and identified in the public mind with the tired old projects of Radical Nonconformity. Sir Robert Reid, James Bryce, and Campbell-Bannerman himself were moderates in domestic issues, all much more conservative than, for example, Asquith and Haldane. Only in the young Lloyd George was there an example of Liberal collectivism opposing the war, but Lloyd George was not yet forty and was still principally known as the fiery adherent of Welsh Nationalism and Church disestablishment. Lloyd George was in any event ~~an individualist,~~ a new species, not fitting into any of the old Liberal categories.[2] Sidney Webb and other Fabians clearly thought that the Liberal Imperialists were the most collectivist of the

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1. Morley, John [Lord]: Liberalism and Imperialism, a speech at Oxford, June 9, 1900.
2. Lord Samuel concurred with this statement in a remark made in the interview discussed in Appendix II.

various Liberal factions. So did the young Liberals of whom Herbert Samuel was one. Mixing as a youth with Fabians and other Socialists, Samuel determined to enter politics with the aim of taking part in social legislation, and aligning himself with the most progressive young Liberals he felt that the Imperialist faction was the leading Liberal group of social reformers. As we shall see, there were no domestic issues at this time upon which the Liberal leaders felt impelled to pronounce strongly, and domestic reform had played a very small role in the party's 1900 election programme. But the future was to belong to that section of the party, strong in intellect and forcefulness of character, which embraced a mild Collectivism and a rabid Imperialism.[1] The key men after Campbell-Bannerman's death and before 1914 were Asquith, Grey, Haldane, and Lloyd George [also, possibly, the young Churchill] and they were all very important between 1905 and 1908 as well; all of them except Lloyd George were alienated from the leading Labour men over the war. Thus the fact that the Pro-Boers were largely men whose day was past, or who lacked sufficient stature or experience, meant that yet another wedge was driven into the already deep cleavage between Liberalism and Labour.

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Imperialism, then, was the deep and burning issue which broke the Liberal Party into pieces in the years between the fall of the Rosebery Government and the end of the Boer War. Spectacular as the imperial conflict was, however, it is over-

1. See Appendix II.

shadowed for the latter-day student of the Liberal decline by the steady, continuous inability of the Liberal Party to evolve a programme of domestic legislation until it was, effectively, too late. After the 1895 election the party was left with the tatters of a programme; rural reforms, registration reform the agitation against the House of Lords, and the ragged remnants of Home Rule. It lost no time in losing whatever credit it possessed on even these grounds. Rural reforms, as we shall see, were proposed ~~each year~~ at the National Liberal Federation conferences, and were passed methodically, with little enthusiasm; the same was true of "one man one vote" and registration reforms. The "Unauthorised Programme", after all, had been put forward in 1885, and 1885 in an age of rapid transition was many years back. The yearly attacks upon the House of Lords continued at the National Liberal Federation meetings, but very little of the agitation was really meant. As the Economist pointed out on March 11, 1899: "The rich men of the party who want to go to that gilded chamber themselves will not give their money to the party funds to secure its abolition . . . . Besides, so long as you merely talk about getting rid of the veto, without explaining how that is to be done, you do not invite enthusiastic support to say the least of it."[1] Nevertheless, year after year the dreary denunciations dragged on, vague, unspecific, in part insincere. The Radical Labouchere-Dilke faction, in its way the leading Radical group, remained strangely hypnotised by the ogre of the Upper Chamber.

1. Economist, vol. 57, p. 347.

seemingly unaware that only a major issue between the two Houses could arouse popular sentiment against the House of Lords. In April, 1896, they formed a new group of twenty members, Dilke and Labouchere being the leaders. In a manifesto which the group issued "they declared that it was their desire to compel the Liberal Party to abandon the old middle-class conception of Radicalism and 'to secure the sympathy of the working classes by the active promotion of those land, labour and social reforms in which they are profoundly interested . . ."[1] This ringing declaration, however, was not followed by a list of basic reforms which the group intended to promote, as for example unemployment benefits, Payment of Members, universal Eight Hours, Old Age pensions, mass housing schemes, or even nationalisation of the railways. For the unspecified reforms in which the working classes were profoundly interested faced the "strongest and most obstinate resistance . . . by the irresponsible and privileged members of the non-elective branch of the legislature."[2] Accordingly, it was on the House of Lords that the group would concentrate its attack and the measures of "profound interest" would have to wait. Not unnaturally, little came of the group or of its manifesto. Little attention was paid to the House of Lords agitation by the official party leadership; a Lords' suspensive veto moved by Labouchere in February, 1899, was unsupported by Campbell-

1. *Annual Register*, 1896, p. 84.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Bannerman and received only 105 Liberal and Irish votes.

The fourth of the by now traditional Liberal programme of reforms, Home Rule, was not drearily and unimaginatively repeated; to all intents and purposes it was dropped. Soon after the defeat of 1895 Liberals were saying in and out of the House of Commons that Home Rule was not a present or practicable issue, or that it should be forgotten. The Liberal-Irish alliance was concluded after ten years. In September, 1896, for example, Rosebery visited Lord Ripon, one of the faithful old Gladstonians: "What he said . . . about his views on Home Rule caused Ripon 'a heavy heart' and he expostulated with him most strongly."[1] Both Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman, as Liberal House of Commons leaders, refused to admit that Home Rule held paramountcy in the Liberal programme. Justin McCarthy, the Irish Nationalist leader, bemoaned the strong group in the party which would foster Imperialism at the expense of Home Rule. McCarthy noted that soon after Gladstone's death in May, 1898 "there can be no question that among a certain section of Liberals the idea had fast taken hold that the policy of Home Rule for Ireland lay buried in his grave."[2] Liberal after Liberal [and especially the Imperialists] proclaimed that the Irish cause, while perhaps still a righteous one, had no present importance and could not expect pre-eminence from a new Liberal Government. The issue seemed to the

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1. Wolf, Lucien: Life of Ripon, vol. 2, London, 1921, p. 244.
2. McCarthy, op. cit., vol. 6, pp. 85-3.

Annual Register to be settled when, late in 1898, Fowler made a speech to his constituents [November 21] disavowing Home Rule from the party's "working programme". When, at about the same time, Morley accepted the commission to write the Gladstone biography, "it was felt that the Irish policy to which Mr. Morley was the first among influential public men to be converted had ceased to be one of those commanding the active allegiance of British Radicals."[1] This attitude of reneging towards Home Rule succeeded only in harming the Liberals; if the cause itself hurt them, dropping it unfulfilled could only injure them the more in the eyes not only of over 80 potential allies in the House of Commons but in the estimation of the general British public.

If the usual rural reforms and the anti-Lords campaign seemed sham rather than real, and if Home Rule had been to all intents and purposes forgotten, what Liberal programme remained? It will be remembered that the almost exclusive emphasis of the public was on foreign affairs, particularly as the events which culminated in the South African war neared their climax. But this emphasis, growing as it did with the years, was at least in large part the result of the Liberal disinclination or inability to put a meaningful programme of social reforms before the public. Despite the return of prosperity around 1896, living conditions in Great Britain were at a level not easily imaginable today, while employment was still far from

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1. Annual Register, 1898, p. 183.

certain for the ordinary unskilled workingman. Clearly, in the absence of a dynamic home policy many workers were captivated by the vision of Empire, a romantic concept far removed from the necessities of everyday living. Had the Liberals been able to evolve a suitable programme it is inconceivable that their prolonged slump after 1895 would have been so severe. But the leaders and even some of their younger followers were unable to devise anything positive. The party ably fought the Government's Education and Agricultural de-rating Bills in 1896 and 1897, and could suggest no practicable alternative. Rosebery, for example, in the year during which he retained the leadership after the General Election of 1895 could do nothing but disquiet his party. Shortly after his resignation he made a speech, saying in part: "It is Liberalism alone which can in the long run successfully compete with the revolutionary theories." Only Liberalism can "prove once more to the country that she and she alone can show a safe middle course between torpor and revolution . . . . I hope that we in our position will not desert the impregnable ground of criticism until we see that the psychological moment has arrived for vigorous attack . . . . I desire on the return of the Liberal party to power that it shall come from the sober and well-considered support of sober and well-considered reforms."[1] Francis Channing, the Radical M.P., said that Rosebery had spoken

1. Robertson, J. M.: The Future of Liberalism, Bradford, 1896 or 1897, pamphlet, p. 12.

"in a sense to make Liberals despair. It was a speech of despondency and disintegration."[1]

This was not, however, Lord Rosebery's only Whiggish pronouncement. A memorandum in 1896 virtually revoked, for him, the Newcastle Programme. Drawn up on August 25, 1896, the memorandum said: "There will be I suppose this autumn calls for a definite Liberal policy. Any such calls will be in my opinion premature, and, as far as I am concerned, futile. In the first place, any promulgation of policy is too soon after the last election and too long before the next election . . . . But, secondly, the Liberal Party needs very tender handling just now. Its personal difficulties for the moment can scarcely be exaggerated . . . In another respect too the Liberal Party required tender handling even more. It is impossible for the Liberal Party to remain nailed to the innumerable political propositions lightly accepted by Mr. Gladstone for the promotion of his Irish policy. The party needs to make a new start and shed much of this . . . . I believe that the best chance for the Liberal Party lies much more in reaction from the present Government than in any gospel of its own."[2] Speaking in the House of Lords on April 15, 1896, Rosebery said that he had never believed in the "long list of reforms" adopted in 1891; it had been a "strategical mistake to attempt to condense the creed of a lifetime into the manifesto of the

1. Channing, op. cit., p. 185.
2. Crewe, Lord: Lord Rosebery, vol. 2, London, 1931, pp. 522-3.

moment - and it is one which the Liberal Party is not likely to repeat."[1] In the same City Liberal Club speech in May, 1899, in which he strongly supported an advanced Imperial policy, Rosebery suggested that the only way to reconstruct the Liberal Party was to return to the past. "Till you have the Liberal Party as it was before 1886, reconstituted in some form or other, or until you have a new party which will embody all the elements which existed before 1886, you will never achieve that predominance in the country which existed when I entered public life, the heritage, and almost the birthright, of the party."[2] Harcourt felt inpart the same; in a letter to Asquith after his resignation he wrote: "I suppose that now with the choice of a new leader there will be a demand for a new programme - which means that all the old heads of the Liberal creed are to be thrown over and something new substituted in their place. Of course this could not and would not be done by me. I stick by the old faith and am resolved to go down with the old ship."[3] And Asquith, in fact, appeared to agree; the Annual Register reported a speech of his early in 1899: "In connection with the choice of a new leader of the party, he saw no necessity for putting forward a new programme, The

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1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 63, June, 1898, p. 925.

2. Spectator, vol. 82, May 13, 1899, p, 666.

3. Spender, J. A. and Asquith, Cyril: Life of Asquith, vol. 1, London, 1932, p. 124.

Liberal Party had two functions to perform - to civilise and to educate."[1] Fowler, writing to Morley early in 1898, noted that discontents were many within the Liberal Party and acknowledged that they meant "the disruption of the Liberal Party and the ultimate division of parties into the Haves and the Have-nots."[2] Yet Fowler could offer nothing to avert this disaster, and Morley, who said he preferred Socialism to Imperialism, could think of no domestic policy but "peace, economy, and reform."[3] McEwan, a Liberal M.P., told his constituents on November 20, 1896, "that he regarded the result of the General Election as a revolt against the new Liberalism, which was really collectivism. The Liberal Party must purge themselves of the heresies of the past few years, and disassociate themselves from all intolerant proposals. The forces of the old and new Liberalism would sooner or later come into collision, and a re-construction of parties would be inevitable."[4]

Nor, strangely, was the emphasis on inertia, the aversion to programme-making, limited to the official leadership or to Conservative Liberals. The young group of Liberals in the House of Commons, supporting Imperialism and looking to Rosebery, Haldane and Asquith for leadership, called themselves the "New Liberals", but their New Liberalism was singularly

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1. Annual Register, 1899, p. 6.
2. Hamilton, Edith: Life of Fowler, London, 1912, p. 439.
3. In the Brechin speech, January 17, 1899. And see Appendix V.
4. Annual Register, 1896, pp. 208-9.

devoid of content aside from a vague opposition to poverty and reliance upon a weak collectivism for social amelioration. At the National Liberal Federation in 1896 Herbert Samuel declared that it was "a wise course not to propose a long series of resolutions at that Conference, re-affirming each single point in the Newcastle Programme . . . . It was their business just now to criticise and oppose the present Government . . . The last Government, in particular, got entangled, if he might say so, in their legislative proposals, and they needed now to appeal to those broad principles to rescue them from that entanglement."[1] The only programme which Samuel, then a young Radical of 25, could offer was a vague incantation of "social reform", opposition to the reactionary Liberals in the North, and attacks on the House of Lords. Haldane himself wrote in 1896: "The hope that the putting forward of the Newcastle Programme would unite the opponents of Conservatism was a piece of folly . . . . Liberalism in its widest sense is an affair of spirit and not of letter . . . . we need be in no anxiety about programmes if we have it in us to rouse the country into the proper frame of mind."[2] How the country was to be roused without a fighting programme was left unexplained and remains inexplicable. The same predicament was true of the six young Liberals who published a volume in 1897 entitled Essays in

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1. Reports of the National Liberal Federation, 1896, pp. 82-3.

2. Progressive Review, vol. 1, 1896, p. 141.

Liberalism, which made a noted stir. While emphatically proclaiming the need for a New Liberalism, they emphasised far more the need to prevent Socialism than to devise a social programme of their own.

As the book was widely popular among Liberals at the time, and as its writers included such academic and forward spirits as J. L. Hammond, F. W. Hirst, and Hilaire Belloc, it is worth noting some of its statements about future policy. In their preface, the six young Liberals stated one of their principles to be "a resolute opposition to the form under which the materialist attacks the state - Socialism,"[1] and quoted from a letter from Mr. Gladstone: "I venture on assuring you that I regard the design formed by you and your friends with sincere interest, and in particular wish well to all the efforts you may make on behalf of individual freedom and independence as opposed to what is termed Collectivism."[2] J. Allsebrook Simon, one of the essayists, wrote: ". . . There is nothing in common between the Socialistic and Liberal idea. This is an unpleasant truth which neither party has thoroughly grasped."[3] Hilaire Belloc said that Socialism was "a theory which makes the individual and all the individual virtues of small account. . . . It would dissolve thrift, and self-control, and the personal honour which keeps a contract sacred."[4] F. W. Hirst

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1. Essays in Liberalism by Six Oxford Men, London, 1897, p. x.
2. Ibid., p. x.
3. Ibid., p. 117.
4. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

maintained that the working classes were inherently property-respecting, and suggested that the cause of the 1895 Liberal defeat had been too much programme, not too little. "A dim apprehension of some fanatic upheaval was undoubtedly the cause of the tremendous reaction at the last General Election."[1] P. J. MacDonnell wrote that politics had been transformed after 1889, as we have seen above; he went on, however, to say that the answer was not to accept Socialism but to combat it: ~~". . . wit~~ ". . . with Socialism there can be no capitulation, no compromise. We must not coquet with it in the future as we have done in the past . . . It is debauching the workers with low emotions . . ."[2] The book was dedicated to John Morley; there was little in it which Morley could have found objectionable.

At the National Liberal Federation, few domestic proposals were put forward, following upon the insistence of the party leaders that no programme was needed. Outside of a wearying repetition of general "Liberal principles", little was done; Home Rule, for example, was never once adopted in the years between 1896 and 1900. In 1896 the only domestic issue pronounced upon was opposition to voluntary schools. In 1897 this stand was repeated, along with support for registration and electoral reforms, payment of election expenses and of members, opposition to the House of Lords veto, and a resolution put forward by Lib-Lab M.P.'s for close Liberal-Labour

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1. Ibid., p. 62.
2. Ibid., p. 273.

co-operations. In moving the resolution Sam Woods asked for 50 seats for workingmen, but none of the Liberal leaders endorsed this stand. Haldane suggested that the true way to break down social barriers was by schools and land reforms. In 1898 the only domestic resolutions were ones reiterating the need for registration and electoral reforms and congratulating the London Progressives on their recent L.C.C. victory. In 1899 was added a land-cum-housing proposal, including "just taxation" of ground values and mining royalites, extension of small holdings, tenants' compensation for improvements, and housing of the working classes. These proposals were merely repetition of the Newcastle Programme, and in 1900, an election year, nothing new was added but temperance reform and women L.C.C. councillors and aldermen. In the whole five-year period nothing was even hinted about old Age Pensions, which Chamberlain had made so live an issue, about steps to ensure security of unemployment or even another, sweeping, Reform Act, with the possible inclusion of women's suffrage.

We saw in our last chapter that the resolutions of the National Liberal Federation were not truly representative of the opinion of ordinary Liberals; in 1898 the Committee admitted as much in a statement which said: "It is customary at these gatherings to pass certain resolutions which are believed to express the wishes of the vast majority of the Liberal Party upon the leading questions of the day. These resolutions are prepared by the Executive Committee after consultation with all

the Federated Associations, and after taking into full consideration any resolutions which may have been passed by the General Committee of the Federation, or at local conferences held under its auspices."[1]

The result of this lack of Liberal energy was a profound apathy which soon settled over Parliament. The _Annual Register_ noted in 1897 that "the languid interest taken in almost everything except in the preparations for the Queen's diamond jubilee extended over the whole area of politics . . . . The extraordinary position in which the Opposition found itself was in some way responsible for this profound apathy. It was not lacking in leaders so much as in principle."[2] A year later it commented: "It would be difficult to find in the history of the century a year in which public apathy on political questions was so evident as on the meeting of Parliament . . . . The questions in which sections of the public were interested were chiefly matters of social reform, from which no political capital could be made [because, of course, of the refusal of the Liberals to make social reform the vital question of the day], and they were consequently ignored or set aside by the occupants of the front benches on both sides of the House."[3] Sir Henry Lucy, the indefatigable recorder of Parliamentary activities, wrote after the 1898 session had

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1. _Reports of the National Liberal Federation_, 1898, p. 41.
2. a _Annual Register_, 1897, p. 119.
3. _Annual Register_, 1898, pp. 10-11.

been prorogued on August 12: "It has been the dullest within the memory of man . . . . According to the testimony of their own faithful followers, Ministers have blundered their way through the Session, leaving opening for attack on every side. The odd thing is, that when attack has been made it has not been led from the enemy's camp, but has flickered forth from below the gangway on the Ministerial side."[1]

But critics of the Liberal Party from its own side were not missing. Liberals who understood the trend of the times existed in number and had their warnings and counsels prevailed, the Liberal Party might yet have adopted policies which could have ensured its longer life. Let us listen to the voices of some of the prophets and critics.

As early as October, 1896, a future Liberal Attorney-General [W. S. Robson] wrote to his wife of the situation in his constituency, South Shields: "Bransby [his agent] says he doesn't believe there is a single miner who will vote against me. Bransby also says that in all his calls everybody has borne testimony to my popularity with all classes. This is my sheet anchor. Liberalism apart from the claims of a Liberal candidate seems to have a very thin thread of life here."[2]

Writing probably in late 1896, J. M. Robertson, the noted freethinker and later Liberal Minister, wrote that the

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1. Lucy, [Sir] Henry; A Diary of the Unionist Parliament, 1895-1900, Bristol, 1901, p. 253.

2. Keeton, G. W.: A Liberal Attorney-General, London, 1949, p. 81.

party leaders "have no industrial policy, no plan for curing the evils of inequality." The leaders "are blatantly negative . . . as regards what I take leave to pronounce the most pressing problems of 'constructive legislation' - Old Age Pensions and the succour of the unemployed. Mr. John Morley, asked for his views on the former, declared that he could not see where the necessary money was to be found. Sir William Harcourt, asked to propose a scheme for the succour of the unemployed, answered that men are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, and that Governments can do little or nothing for the workers save by giving them free education and freedom of trade and combination."[1] Robertson's own programme, not unlike that of the Metropolitan Radical Federation, included nationalisation of the railways, old age pensions, and measuers to mitigate unemployment. Old age pensions would have been a particularly auspicious cause for Liberals, for Chamberlain's championing of them in 1895 had been forgotten since.

A little later the young school of New Liberals founded a new journal, entitled the Progressive Review, which was intended to enunciate and support a distinctly collectivist Radical point of view. Herbert Samuel, for one, was a supporter of the scheme, J. A. Hobson, the Radical economist, was an editor, and Ramsay MacDonald was the secretary of the company which founded it. The Review ran for only a little over a

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1. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

year, but during that period was a distinct and distinguished proponent of left-wing views, Haldane, the Webbs, and Keir Hardie being among its contributors. Though Samuel wrote: "The I.L.P. must expect from Liberals an attitude of uncompromising attack . . ."[1], yet the attitude of the journal was not at all unfriendly to organised labour or to social legislation. Early in 1897 the editors commented that the Liberal Party in the House of Commons was doing nothing and added: "What is needed is a positive and forward policy having for its object the substantial amelioration of the conditions of social life for the great masses of our industrial population. There are many men in the Liberal ranks of the House of Commons, and some in the comparatively small group of official Liberals, who cannot by any conceivable stretch of the imagination be accused of any deep sympathy with the lot of the toiling multitudes . . ."[2] Later in the year they commented that "there is not a single question of any importance - particularly questions relating to social politics - upon which the whole Liberal Party, not even the membership of the House of Commons, is united whole-heartedly . . ."[3] They went on to say: "A programme to be tolerably successful must be very advanced . . . The democracy will not be content with political liberty . . ." We must "look for an increase of prosperity not so much from a

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1. Progressive Review, vol. 1, p. 250, 1896.
2. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 387-8, 1897.
3. Ibid., vol. 2, 1897, p. 487.

development of the individual virtues as from an increase of the powers of the state . . ."[1] The editors realised that a union between the "Socialistic Liberals" and the older type "could not be trusted to give any support worth having to a programme of drastic social reform of a Collectivist kind. The result of any union on such grounds would be an election fought with still more disunited forces and varied cries than the last, when doles for dockyards was the cry in the South, municipal socialism in London, local veto in the Midlands, Disestablishment in Wales, the traditions of Liberalism and Mr. Gladstone's memory in Scotland."[2] The comment was further made that the New Liberalism was still vague, that it had not declared its programme or views, and that one of the supreme questions of politics was to conciliate the I.L.P. and adopt some part of its programme, a move which MacDonald, if not Keir Hardie, would have welcomed.

Also writing in the Progressive Review in 1897, Robert Wallace, the Radical M.P., commented that in an overwhelmingly Conservative Parliament Liberal leaders should be "exceptionally progressive. Have they been so here? . . . How can they be? What policy can they plead for? True Liberalism demands that its tradition should be carried on, and that its principles should be worked out to their full Democratic conclusions. How can the existing leaders do this? They are practical aristocrats, members of an oligarchy, self-appointed, not democratically chosen . . . What, then, have they to offer?

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1. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 488, p. 492.
2. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 488.

The New Liberalism can only mutter 'social reforms', more Factory Acts, more compensation Bills. But Mr. Chamberlain can outbid them on that ground, and they will perish of impotence unless they can muster up courage . . ."[1] Writing a little earlier, in answer to Haldane, Wallace had commented on the vagueness of the New Liberalism, and said: "The 'New Liberal-ism' professes a horror of programmes . . . But, after all, what is this now despised thing called a programme? It is simply a definite and portable statement of what you are driving at, and unless people know what you are after you can hardly expect them to come after you. No; without a rousing programme you will never 'rouse the country'."[2]

Writing in the Nineteenth Century in January, 1898, Guinness Rogers admitted that "the unhappy action of the Independent Labour Party has not only sometimes caused division in the constituencies, but has either detached from the Liberal ranks some of its most solid supporters or seriously chilled their enthusiasm."[3] In the same month, writing in the Fortnightly Review, an anonymous Liberal commented that "It is notorious, painfully notorious, that every effort made by independent sections of the democratic party to quicken the interest of the masses in the pressing questions of the House has been regarded as an offence by the official managers of the Liberal Party . . . To suggest increased activity is blasphemous; to

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1. Ibid., vol. 2, 1897, p. 432.
2. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 176.
3. Nineteenth Century, vol. 43, p. 140.

put forward the lines of a possible programme is a crime."[1] The writer shared with many others a lively antipathy to the officials and proceedings of the National Liberal Federation, which, as we have seen, adopted as Liberal policy no single new social proposal between 1895 and 1900, and which was dominated by the tired old leaders. In 1898, for example, Morley proclaimed that, unlike other Liberal leaders, he stood by the Newcastle Programme: "I am not going to turn my back upon a single one of its items."[2] But having said this, Morley could do no more than support again the tired items of Home Rule, House of Lords Reform, and temperance legislation. As in the past, he declared: "In my judgment there is no part of the area of social reform that is within the reach of legislation so important as temperance reform."[3] This was the sort of situation which caused the above Fortnightly Review writer to comment: ". . . At no time since a democratic party came into existence in Great Britain has there been a less degree of sympathy, of mutual trust, between its official leaders and its millions of adherents and supporters. The leaders do not know what the people are thinking; the people do not know what the leaders are thinking . . . . That the reactionary oligarchy represented by the present Ministry should rejoice over such a state of things is comprehensible enough; that

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1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 63, p. 2.
2. Watson, op. cit., pp. 227-8.
3. Reports of the National Liberal Federation, 1898, p. 93.

there should be anywhere a Liberal who fails to resent it is incomprehensible altogether."[1] The writer pointed out that the triumph of Liberal principles had been due not to machinery, but to enthusiasm. "Enthusiasm found the machinery that was necessary . . . The National Liberal Federation came into existence as the organised expression of the strength of a united and triumphant democratic party . . ."[2]

A few months later there appeared in the Fortnightly a revealing article, also unsigned, which analysed the composition of the Liberal constituency parties, an analysis which is particularly helpful when one wonders why the Radicals found so little popular support and seemed so alienated from the mass of working-class opinion. In Parliament the writer found the Liberal Party "flabby, divided, and almost impotent."[3] It was divided into several factions; Irish supporters, Welsh, Scottish, Labour and many others. "Thus, in the House of Commons, the Liberal Party is of many colours and diverse texture."[4] On the other hand, "in the constituencies it is showing considerable activity, and in the counting of heads, is, if the figures of bye-elections go for anything, pretty well as numerous as it has been any time since 1885."[5] Analysing the local associations, the writer said that in county

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1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 63, p. 2, p. 3.
2. Ibid., p. 4.
3. Ibid., June, 1898, p. 910.
4. Ibid., p. 913.
5. Ibid., p. 910.

constituencies almost no Liberal landowners were left. Where there was one: "He is made President of every local Liberal association and elected to any office that he cares to hold."[1] In every possible case the Radicals appointed landowners to leadership; where none was available "recourse is had for leadership to the small manufacturer or principal shopkeeper of the county town, but in the proportion of ten to one, the party is composed of labourers and artisans, so as nearly to approach the horizontal separation of parties by classes . . ."[2] This division of bourgeois leadership and working-class membership, and the tendency towards the division of parties on a class basis which the writer deplored, was true of the boroughs as well: "a fair leavening" of middle-class men were left for leadership, but "even here, especially in the north country, there is always going on a secession of the small employer, who is alarmed for his daily bread by the programme of industrial innovations, proclaimed from the housetops of every city that is selected for the annual meeting of the Trades Union Congress. Just at present there may be a slight back-eddy on account of the recent proof furnished by the Workers' Compensation Act that 'socialistic' legislation is not the belonging of one party in the commonwealth, but this will lose its current again before long."[3] Here is a clear indication of the

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1. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 916, June, 1898.
2. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 916-7.
3. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 917.

dilemma that Liberalism was rapidly finding impossible to escape or to solve; on the one hand withdrawal of conservative, old-fashioned Liberals on grounds of objection to "socialistic" schemes, on the other the gradual alienation of the working-classes because of dissatisfaction with the inertia of the official leadership. Another harmful factor was "the eternal want of pounds and pence" and the even greater difficulty of finding suitable candidates. As Clem Edwards had pointed out in 1894, Liberalism would soon be unable to "run with the hare and chase with the hounds".

Liberals had been winning by-elections at a steady rate in 1897 and 1898, and a writer in the Fortnightly, having analysed election statistics with great care, concluded that the party leadership gave no lead to Liberals but that by-election victories were largely those of the Radical section of the party. The "personal and direct investigation of popular feeling" showed that "both relatively and absolutely the figures of the Liberal polls show a result that may well animate with the keenest hopes and nerve to sustained efforts all Liberal workers. But nothing like proof is yet forthcoming that of itself the pendulum will recede to the extreme and determining point necessary to replace Unionism by Liberalism . . . A stirring cry will, therefore, probably be judged indispensable. It is not now as it was in 1886, and as it has been before, the moderate men representing the common-sense of the people, who are alienated from, suspicious of, or disheartened by, the

tactics of Sir William Harcourt and his staff. Speaking from the same personal and direct investigation of popular feeling which has been already cited, one finds the estrangement to be that of the more progressive wing of Liberalism, which has, in the long run, always set the pace to the rest of the party."[1] By February, 1898, in 30 by-elections the Liberal Party had gained 6 seats, by February 1899 8 seats had been gained in 43 contests, and by February 1900 11 seats in 61 contests. Thus while progress declined with the advent of the war, the Liberal Party gained seats consistently over the 4½ years following the Election of 1895.

Discontent manifested itself increasingly as the distance to the next General Election diminished. In the interim period between Sir William Harcourt's resignation and his succession by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman much voicing of present discontents could be heard from the Liberal Left. In a speech, for example, on January 5, 1899, Sir Charles Dilke, still active and still known as a "friend of labour", suggested that the general political apathy then prevailing was largely due to the Liberal Party itself. Furthermore: "The advanced Liberals, he maintained, formed the bulk of the Liberal electorate, but they were in a minority on the Liberal side of the House of Commons."[2] Gloomily, Dilke predicted the choice of a conservative leader. A short time later an interesting

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1. Ibid., January, 1898, p. 17.
2. Annual Register, 1899, p. 3.

article appeared in the *Fortnightly*, written by a young Radical politician, abviously with some knowledge of the inner workings of Liberal politics. From the inside, he wrote, "one sees nothing but wire-pulling, intriguing, and vote-catching elaborated to a fine art." The leadership was "profoundly ignorant" of the true principles of Liberalism. "To many of us young Liberals who think that Liberalism, which has lost its convictions, has lost its only reason of being: who, eager for work, yet know not where to turn for inspiration or guidance: the outlook is peculiarly depressing."[1] It was even worse, since: "if there is one lesson to be drawn from recent by-elections it is this: that there is an enormous mass of Liberal opinion in the provinces which, were it only properly fostered and directed, would completely rehabilitate the party in a very short time."[2] Evidently the lesson of the L.C.C. elections the year before had not been lost upon the young man; in 1895 59 "Progressives" [Radicals] had been returned with 59 "Moderates" [Conservatives], while three years later the result was 68 Progressives to 48 Moderates. London Radicalism was still far left-wing as the Liberal Party then understood the term, and its achievement was the more notable when one remembers that both in 1895 and 1900 London returned nationally 54 Unionists to 8 Liberals. The young writer pointed out that

1. *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 65, July, 1899, p. 18.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the triumph of Liberal political principles was now close to complete; what was now the absolute and imperative need for the party was to turn to a broad social programme. He said: "To some of us . . . it seems odd that so many Liberals are so fearful of entering on a campaign of social as distinguished from political reform. It is as though they had spent years in fashioning as perfect an instrument as possible for the people, who, when they innocently attempt to use it, are reproachfully told: 'Oh! We didn't mean that, you know!!'"[1] The old-fashioned recoiled in horror from social legislation, but the times demanded change; if Liberals did not act the Tories would, not in a sense to harm the great vested interests but to legislate measures "which are sufficiently coloured with collectivist principles to appeal to the average British artisan . . . . Rightly or wrongly we are committed to the principle of State-interference and State-control in the industrial sphere. It is useless for the capitalists of the Liberal Party to cling despairingly to the rags of their Manchesterian political philosophy . . . . . Laissez-faire is absolutely discredited, a fact which seems to dawn but slowly on the minds of certain Liberals."[2]

Over and over again Liberal writers pointed out that a social programme must be evolved, and as the Boer War began they emphasised that the attention of the country, now turned

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

to military glory, would fall back on domestic legislation in redoubled vigour. One of them pointed out: "The next revival of the Radical spirit will carry the democratic demand past the point at which Mr. Chamberlain will be able to induce his present party to compete; and finance will be the issue for Liberalism in the new era as was franchise in the past."[1]

While Liberal Party workers agitated for a more Radical policy, and while pundits were adept in pointing out that the two parties were far more similar on lines of domestic as well as foreign affairs than was the Liberal Right to its Left, while critics saw that a great new social programme would soon be demanded, as much despair was felt by left-wing critics as critical determination. Many Liberals saw that the party was little more "progressive" than the Tories. Many of them glumly agreed with the conclusions of an article by Keir Hardie and MacDonald, who pointed out that "Liberalism cannot stand for one thing in one constituency and another thing in another, and yet retain the support of intelligent and serious reformers."[2] A series of articles in the Contemporary Review by "A New Radical", who appears from his style and references to have been Haldane, and who obviously wrote as one deeply familiar with Liberal internal politics, revealed the current despair of reformers who acknowledged their party's degradation without feeling able to turn to the I.L.P. for a lead. Writing in

1. Fortnightly Review, vol. 68, Spetember, 1900, pp. 468-9.
2. Nineteenth Century, vol. 68, January, 1900, p. 21.

October, 1897, the New Radical pointed out the depth of the party divisions and the lack of a policy on the vital issues of the day, as for example Old Age Pensions, a subject on which a few members of the party carried on a systematic agitation, but with no real support from the leaders. After examining the sad situation the New Radical exclaimed: "I never knew a time when the Liberal Party was so absolutely devoid of any sort of leading. A man of character would do; or an idea would do; but there is neither . . ."[1] One by one the leaders of the party were examined and discarded: Rosebery was regarded as woefully inept as a leader both in power and out; Harcourt was regarded commonly as possessing "no belief and less enthusiasm"; Morley was hated by Whigs as a revolutionary, by working men as a Whig; Asquith had been a great success at the Home Office, but since then either office or social success [i.e. the influence of the glittering Margot Tennant, his second wife] "has changed him. He has rapidly become one of the governing classes . . . .The party gets no help from him and certainly no sort of inspiration." Finally, Campbell-Bannerman "is too rich and lazy . . ."[2] Almost a year later the New Radical was gloomily convinced that no Liberal Prime Minister could or would enact any Bill worthy of support because of the factions in the party. Payment of Members, for example: "Do you suppose there is anybody on the Front Bench who seriously intends to put that

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1. Contemporary Review, vol. 72, p. 601.
2. Ibid., p. 602, p. 603, p. 606, p. 607.

through? . . .It is a measure which the workman wants and is entitled to claim; and yet it is a measure which your illustrious leaders have not the slightest serious intention of giving him."[1] The only thing the party could expect or even hope for now was another electoral defeat. In January, 1899, the situation appeared even blacker; looking back on the last session the New Radical said: "Harcourt . . . was hardly ever there . . . Morley was not much there either, and when he was, he was always dissatisfied with the universe in general. Asquith was attending to his practice at the Bar. Fowler was thinking of telephones and water companies, Campbell-Bannerman was lazy, and Bryce is incurably academic; so there was really nobody left to run the show except Haldane and Lloyd George, and they did the best they could."[2]

In sum, there was much criticism by Liberals themselves of the slowness and conservatism of their official leadership. This criticism was not well-formed or specific; rather it was negative in the main, realising only that collectivism must somehow be embraced, without understanding how or putting forward measures of significance. Here it was that the Liberal Party was failed by its leaders, who could or would not formalise the general feeling into a specific programme of social problems and who, preoccupied by personal and Imperial problems, left the thinking-out and compiling of a new programme until too late.

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1. Contemporary Review, vol. 74, August, 1898, pp. 300-01.
2. Ibid., vol. 75, p. 148.

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Thus by 1900 the Liberal Party was sick almost unto death, divided upon foreign affairs, divided upon domestic affairs, and with no generally agreed upon set of proposals with which to confront the country. In a vain effort to distract public attention from the war, the National Liberal Federation Office sent out a circular a short time before the election, maintaining that "Liberals were never more at one than they are today on those questions of domestic and social reform which divide the two great parties of the State."[1] Those questions, however, appeared to be: "Registration and Electoral Reforms, the House of Lords, the Land laws, Temperance, Religious Equality, and the Housing of the Working Classes, Popular Control of Elementary Schools, and many other issues . . ."[2] Almost all of these items, however, suffered from one of three complaints; either they had little popular appeal, or were "fads" appealing to groups, especially the Nonconformists, or they were accepted by the Unionists. Not one of them made a great rallying issue to take to the people; almost all of them were hackneyed and uninviting to the Radical collectivists or advanced Liberals, let alone to Socialists. The Annual Register recorded at the General Election that while Liberals manifestly treated Home Rule as dead or paralysed they had nothing new to offer. "As compared with the elections of 1892 and 1895," it wrote, "neither party committed itself extensively to promises of

1. Watson, op. cit., p. 251.
2. Ibid., p. 251. It is notable that Home Rule was missing from the list.

legislation on subjects of importance. Opposition speakers from Sir William Harcourt downwards sneered at Mr. Chamberlain and his colleagues for having done nothing to fulfill the expectations raised in 1895 with regard to old age pensions. But Liberals in any responsible position studiously avoided the suggestion that if returned to power in place of their rivals they would produce any general scheme of old age pensions."[1] Moreover, the Labour Representation Committee was now in the field, elected two of its candidates in 1900, and took away many voters from the Liberals, "at a time," Spender wrote, "when Liberalism seemed to need every vote if it was to maintain its existence."[2]

Mrs. Webb in her diaries recorded the progressive humiliations and defeats which Liberalism suffered in these years. Year by year she wrote of her conversations with or impressions of Liberal leaders - their inactivity, their lack of leadership, their loss of faith and inability to understand the new movements. Asquith, for example, was reduced late in 1898 to vague proprosals for the referendum on the Swiss model, proposals which Morley, among others, promptly repudiated. As the election was ending Mrs. Webb wrote in her diary

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1. Annual Register, 1900, p. 201.

2. Spender, J. A.: The Public Life, vol. 1, London, 1935, p. 152. The L.R.C. put forward 14 candidates; two were elected, four caused a Liberal defeat, and seven forced the Liberal candidate to withdraw. In no case did a Liberal win against both L.R.C. and Conservative opposition.

[October 7, 1900]: "The Liberal Party, divided against itself, uncertain as to its policy, is being badly routed at the polls . . . Who could trust a party with a lay figure as ostensible leader, and as the real leaders of its sections men who hate each other, and each other's ideas, more than they do the persons or views of the enemy. And there seems little hope for the Liberals in the near future. To win back the large towns they have to give up Home Rule, Local Veto and Disestablishment; they have to become Imperialists and develop some kind of social programme. In giving up the old politics, they alienate the Celtic fringes, and all the provincial Liberal politicians; in imperialism they cannot outbid the Tories; in all social questions, they lack knowledge or convictions and fear to lose their remaining rich men. So they will fall back on the Rosebery plan of 'no policy', hoping that they may be accepted as the only alternative to a Government gone stale. That may cause the adhesion, one by one, of men [mostly of the upper and middle class] who are personally offended by the Government: or who belong to interests that are threatened by the expenditure and innovation of Tory democracy. But it will not bring back to their ranks the great mass of town workers who want some strong lead . . . something blatant and positive in return for their votes."[1] Sadly, J. A. Spender commented in November, 1900: ". . . The old Liberal Party, as we know it, will pass out of existence if those responsible for it continue to play fast and loose with it,

1. Webb, Beatrice: Our Partnership, p. 201.

as they have done during the past five years. The really humiliating part of the election to Liberals is the reflection which comes after everything else has been said - that their opponents could not have ventured to conduct the campaign as they did if their own weakness had not invited it. To hit a man when he is down is the first of electioneering instincts, and Mr. Chamberlain did but act upon it."[1]

* * *

By the end of 1900, then, the Liberal Party had been reduced to depths which it had never before known. Two successive humiliating electoral defeats, divisions over policy, lack of leadership; it was doubtful that the party would ever again possess its former pre-eminence, and many writers predicted its imminent collapse. But twenty years before it had stood supreme with a sweeping majoirty, a peerless leader and a popular programme; now it possessed none of those assets. In twenty years the Liberal Party had declined continuously, till by the end of the century Liberalism was a tarnished and discredited creed. It was not yet dead, but it was fast dying; only its Indian Summer was left. Its record had been one of lost causes and unseized opportunities. The twenty years since 1880 had seen the decline of the Liberal Party; the next twenty were to witness its effective collapse.

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1. Contemporary Review, November, 1900, vol. 78, p. 753.

CHAPTER 8

IN CONCLUSION

The recovery of the Liberal Party after 1900 was slow and uneven; for some time, in fact, it seemed that the party might be growing more divided and incoherent instead of stronger. It was in 1901 that Campbell-Bannerman infuriated the Liberal Imperialists by his famous "methods of barbarism" speech and provoked sharp replies. Rosebery's decision to "plow the lonely furrow" did not leave his lieutenants helpless, and Rosebery himself made occasional pronouncements from the furrow, notably the Chesterfield speech of 1901. In 1902 the Liberal League was formed as a group of Imperialists separate from the party and led by Rosebery; it even more forcibly emphasised the divergences among Liberals and led to speculation as to the possibility of a formal break-up. The Boer War's end in 1902 did not bring surcease to the weary Liberals. Division was strong on domestic policy, and no new programme was devolved, despite the fact that the Labour Representation Committee, strengthened by the strong trade union opposition to the Taff Vale decision, won three by-elections between 1900 and 1906.

But at last to the grateful Liberal Party came a sorely needed gift in the form of Unionist division after eight years of almost unbroken good fortune. On May 15, 1903, Joseph Chamberlain, now nearing seventy but still the same vigorous fighter, made a speech in his Birmingham stronghold advocating

tariff reform, the echoes of which quickly reverberated all over the country. Instantly it split the Government, for many Conservatives were strong Free Traders, as were most of the remaining Liberal Unionists, notably the Duke of Devonshire. But Chamberlain with his exaggerated imperial vision saw a protective tariff as a blessing to the Empire and to national prosperity, and with all his old force campaigned for it up and down the country, splitting Conservatives over the issue as he had helped to split Liberals over Home Rule seventeen years before. For the Liberals the situation was one of sheer joy. A year later Margot Asquith commented in her diary about the original Birmingham speech "which," she wrote, "as my husband said, had transformed the position of every political party. It advocated for the first time a policy of naked Protectionism, and woke up the barely controlled hopes of the whole Tory Party. This caught on like wild-fire with the semi-clever, moderately educated, the Imperialists, Dukes, Journalists and Fighting Forces; incidentally bringing unity to the Liberals and chaos into the Government ranks."[1]

This last phrase, almost casually set down, revealed the crux of the situation. The Liberal Party, which had not been able to unite on any issue for eight unhappy years after 1895 [or, in fact, for years before that] rallied to defend the cherished shibboleth of Free Trade which, more than any other,

1. The Autobiography of Margot Asquith, vol. 2, Harmondsworth, 1936, p. 46, my emphasis.

was the birthright and emblem of the party. Liberal Imperialists, Little Englanders, Lib-Labs, conservative Liberal businessmen; all gathered together to protect the threatened cause. The "incidental unity" which was thus achieved was more than sufficient to last for three years and to bring the Liberal Party into office with a sweeping victory in 1906. The Cabinet was shattered to pieces and the Conservative Party in the country suffered sorely. Asquith in particular became the Liberal hero, as he followed Chamberlain around the country, making strong Free-Trading speeches.

Other missteps hurt the Government as well. An epoch-making Education Act, providing for the first time for a national system of secondary schools, ran afoul of the Nonconformists through being favourable to the maintenance and increase of Church Schools and rallied Nonconformist leaders even more strongly behind the Liberal Party. A Licensing Act achieved the distinction of being opposed both by the advocates of temperance legislation and by the brewers and publicans. The aftermath of the Boer War contained an unhappy episode for the Government due to the system of imported, indentured Chinese labour in South Africa; the plight of the unfortunate Chinese was widely publicised by Liberals and deplored as "Chinese slave labour", to maximum advantage. The Government's refusal to modify the harsh decree of the Taff Vale decision further increased its unpopularity with the working classes.[1]

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1. See Appendix II.

By December, 1905, A. J. Balfour [who had succeeded his uncle Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister in 1902] had wearied of the strain of governing while losing authority and popularity almost daily. A drastic Cabinet re-shuffle, while removing some of the more outspoken Protectionists and Free-Fooders, had done nothing to restore stability to the Government. Instead of dissolving, however, Balfour resigned, hoping that the Liberals would prove too disorganised to be able to co-operate with each other in governing. Credence was lent to this hope by a speech of Rosebery's at Bodmin only a few weeks before, in which the ex-Premier had denounced Home Rule, saying that "he could never serve under that banner."[1] Instead of leading a "cave", however, Rosebery merely dug his furrow deeper, so much so as to become his political grave. Campbell-Bannerman, the new Prime Minister, had another problem to solve as well, one which promised to be of greater magnitude. A serious "cave" appeared in the form of rebellion by the three leading Liberal Imperialists, Asquith, Grey and Haldane, who refused to take office unless "C.-B." would go to the House of Lords, leaving Asquith to rule over the lower House. Sir Henry hesitated, but after consulting his wife did not give way, and in the end the recalcitrant three were forced to yield. Their acquiescence was well worth-while; Asquith was made Chancellor of the Exchequer, Grey Foreign Secretary, and Haldane Secretary for War. Together they held great influence in domestic

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1. Spender, J. A. and Asquith, Cyril: <u>Life of Asquith</u>, vol. 1, London, 1932, p. 109.

affairs and virtual predominance in diplomacy, with far-reaching results.[1]

Parliament was dissolved early in January, 1906, and the election followed immediately. It was first and foremost a negative campaign, and the issue of Free Trade assumed predominance. Chamberlain took up a remark of C.-B.'s that twelve million people were on the verge of starvation to draw the moral that Protection was necessary to raise living standards. To the Liberals, however, the issue was simply one of dearer food, and they played on this theme all over the land. Asquith's biographers write of his campaign, for example: "His dominant theme was Free Trade with glances forward at the social measures promised for the new Parliament, accompanied by warnings, which became a Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the redemption of all electioneering promises would depend on sound and frugal finance."[2]

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1. In his autobiography Haldane wrote revealingly of this incident: "Asquith, Grey and I were thoroughly aware that the Liberal Party, although better off than that of the Unionists, was in a profoundly unsatisfactory condition. We had only one great asset, and that was our Free Trade creed. Home Rule was not a practical possibility for the moment. In education and other subjects the party was devoid of any large ideas. Yet while it was probably about to be returned to power, Campbell-Bannerman being as popular as he was, we thought that he was ill qualified to find for the great progressive force the new basis which it required . . . Morley was not really fitted to help; Rosebery had put himself out of court; and the other leaders of the party outside of that section of it that followed our group were hopelessly lacking. We resolved to take some step." /Haldane, R. B.: _An Autobiography_, London, 1929, p. 158./
2. Spender and Asquith, _op. cit._, vol. 1, p. 176.

Campbell-Bannerman in a phrase reminiscent of the Unauthorised Campaign of 1885 said: "We must make the land not so much the pleasure ground of the rich as the treasure ground of the poor."[1] Commenting on his address to his electors, however, the Annual Register remarked: "The address of the Prime Minister . . . contained more about his opponents' policy than about his own."[2] "C.-B." said that "protection was immoral, oppressive and corrupting. The policy of the present Government was well known to the electors. While maintaining the time-honoured principles of Liberalism, they would repair as far as possible the mischief wrought in recent years. In foreign affairs the Unionists had renounced the former undesirable characteristics of their foreign policy, and had made it possible for the Government, without departing from Liberal traditions, to pursue a substantial continuity of foreign policy."[3] There was no "authorised" Liberal programme, but the various leaders put forward their own favoured proposals; Asquith supported a wider Workmen's Compensation Act, Augustine Birrell, the Minister of Education, promised full popular control of education, and Sidney Buxton called for the taxation of ground rents. The major part of the Liberal social programme, however, consisted of attacking the Unionists as being the rich man's party and their policies as those of

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1. Brockway, Fenner: Labour and Liberalism, Manchester, 1913 or 1914, p. 9.
2. Annual Register, 1906, p. 3.
3. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

"plutocracy". Soon after the election the Quarterly Review commented: "The attack on Chinese labour, on Protection and on the Taff Vale judgement, all formed part of an accusation of plutocratic conspiracy. Even the Education Act was represented as a victory for privilege, and so fell in with the general charge that Unionists were the party of the rich and selfish . . . . The issue thus seemed to be Rich versus Poor - the aristocracy, the capitalists, the mine-owners, and the parsons, leagued together and backed by all the resources of wealth, knowledge, great organisations, and an able and unscrupulous journalism, on the one side; and upon the other, the poor, industrious workman whose patriotic fervour had made him the dupe of the cunning covetousness of the plutocrats of Park Lane, and whose poverty, freedom, and independence were now threatened with dear food, the capture of the people's schools, and the loss of the power to strike for better wages."[1] The Quarterly Review went on to comment that the election had been, in the main, a negative rather than a positive one; the country had rejected the Unionists with more of a will than it had supported the Liberals. " . . . The place of honour in their programme was given by the victors to what was negative; the positive reforms were subordinate. As the electors are now minded, the negative position is the advantageous one; they are much readier to say 'no' than 'yes'."[2] Halévy

1. Quarterly Review, vol. 204, April, 1906, pp. 572-3.
2. Ibid., p. 575.

concurs: "The programme on which the new majority had been returned was undoubtedly first and foremost a purely negative programme . . ."[1] And D. C. Somervell comments: "It was not necessary for Liberals to stress the awkward articles of their own professed creed. Home Rule would be postponed for a season, the ridiculous old shibboleths of local veto and disestablishment of the Church could be forgotten altogether. It was sufficient to say that one would right the wrongs of the past five years . . ."[2] In short, while there was unquestionably a left-ward trend in 1906, the overwhelming Liberal majority came neither from party unity nor the merits of the Liberal programme: change was sorely desired, the Liberals were the obvious alternative to the Unionists; accordingly, the country voted Liberal.

The electoral result, which amazed the Liberal leaders, was the greatest landslide which the country had known since the great Reform Bill of 1832.[3] Four hundred and one seats went to the Liberal Party, only 157 to the Unionists, 83 to the Irish Nationalists and 29 to the Labour Representation Committee. Even in its worst years the Liberal Party had won more seats than 157, and it could now count for most purposes on the aid of the Irish and the L.R.C., now newly named the

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1. Halévy, Élie: A History of the English People, 1905-1914, London, 1934, p. 12.

2. Somervell, D. C.: British Politics since 1900, New York, 1950, pp. 54-5.

3. Similar landslides have since taken place in 1918 and 1931.

Labour Party. With its allies the Government possessed a majority of 356, and against all other parties its majority was still 132.

Behind the electoral figures, however, lay some disquieting facts for the Liberal Party. In the first place, its lead in seats was not paralleled by a similar landslide in popular votes. The Liberal Yearbook for 1907 gives the total Liberal and Labour votes in Great Britain as 3,044,346 and the total Unionist votes as 2,407,928. Subtracting the official Labour Party figure of 323,195 as the L.R.C. vote, we are left with a Liberal majority of only 313,233 in a total Liberal-Conservative poll of over five million votes. Another 150,000 votes were won by the Conservatives in Ireland, reducing the Liberal majority to only 163,000. Thus, despite the landslide victory, the Liberal Party won just under 52 per cent of the two-party vote while the Conservatives won over 48 per cent. The Liberal Yearbook acknowledged that the anti-Unionist majority should, on the basis of the popular vote, have been not 356 but 94. The Conservative Constitutional Yearbook estimated that the Liberals won 2,583,132 votes and the Conservatives 2,463,606. This striking similarity was not due, moreover, to uncontested seats, for in marked contrast to 1895 and 1900 only about thirty seats in the entire country [apart, of course, from Ireland] were uncontested.

Secondly, the election was notable for the success of the Labour Party. Running 55 candidates, it succeeded in

electing 29 [in addition, one Lib-Lab M.P. joined the Labour Party soon after the election], and its popular vote went up from under 60,000 in 1900 to over 300,000. Liberal forebearance had aided the Labour Party; of the 29 victorious candidates only six had had to face Liberal opposition, but the Liberal forebearance was in effect a tribute to the Labour Party. The Liberals had been forced by the strength of the L.R.C. to abandon the fight in certain constituencies, and in some cases where they did enter a candidate in a three-cornered fight the result was Conservative success.[1] Moreover, the number of Lib-Labs rose from 8 to 24; of this number 13 were miners, and almost all of them deserted the Liberal Party when the Miners Federation joined the Labour Party in 1908. The significance of the Labour success was not lost upon the leaders of the defeated party; on January 23, 1906, Joseph Chamberlain wrote to Margot Asquith: "You are quite right in saying that I agreed with you that every week we stayed in after the end of 1903 cost us many votes - but even then I did not anticipate the Labour earthquake."[2] A. J. Balfour, a discerning critic [and one who lost the Manchester seat he had held for over twenty years in the landslide], wrote to Lady Salisbury: "If I read the signs aright, what has occurred has nothing whatever to do with any of the things which we have

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1. This was the case in seven constituency elections.
2. Asquith, Margot, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 66.

been squabbling over the last few years. C.-B. is a mere cork, dancing on a torrent which he cannot control, and what is going on here is the faint echo of the same movement which has produced massacres in St. Petersburg, riots in Vienna, and Socialist processions in Berlin."[1]

The history of the Liberal Government in the years before 1910 was one of great achievements, notably the enaction of [permissive] Free School Meals, the Workmen's Compensation Act, Old Age Pensions, the Trade Disputes Act, the Miners' Eight-Hour Day, the Trade Boards Act, the Labour Exchanges Act, the Housing and Town Planning Act and others. Yet behind this glittering facade the process of Liberal schism and Liberal decline went on. In the case of the Trade Disputes Act, for example, there arose an incident of importance. The high Labour poll had been amassed in large part because of the Taff Vale decision's confining of Trade Union rights within a narrow scale. Upon its assumption of office in 1905 the Liberal Government drafted a Trade Disputes Bill which would remove restrictions in most cases, but which fell short of the complete freedom of trade union action which Labour desired. In 1906 the Labour members succeeded in persuading Campbell-Bannerman to drop the Liberal Bill and to adopt as a Government measure a more comprehensive Bill which they had drawn up. C.-B. agreed, but not without the loss of much Liberal

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1. Dugdale, Blanche: Life of Balfour, vol. 1, London, 1936, pp. 438-9.

prestige and against the advice of many of his Cabinet; Asquith and five other Ministers abstained from voting for the measure. Halévy comments that the Trade Disputes Act was "snatched by fear from the politicians of the older parties."[1]

The Labour members were also responsible for the act allowing local authorities to provide free meals for school children and for the extending of the Workmen's Compensation Act to new categories, involving millions of additional workers. Their pressure was felt as well in the enactment of the Miners' Eight Hour Act in 1908, which nevertheless only partially satisfied the miners' claims. Halévy comments: "The pressure of Labour was irresistible. Neither the Liberals, afraid of strengthening the Labour Party, nor the Unionists afraid of strengthening the Liberals could resist it."[2] He goes on to cite a speech of Herbert Samuel's, warning that the alternative was a coal strike "and nothing else", and adds: "It was all very well for Opposition speakers to declare it scandalous for a member of the Government to make such a

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1. Halévy, op. cit., p. 441. Haldane later wrote of this incident: "A new spirit was disclosing itself, a spirit that was moving the democracy to go beyond the old-fashioned Liberal tradition and to show that it would be content with nothing short of a demonstration that the democracy was for the future to have the last word." More generally, he admitted: "We Liberals failed to realise in the beginning of 1906 that the spirit was rapidly changing, and that the outlook of Victorian Liberalism was not sufficient for the progressive movement which had set in . . ." [Haldane, op. cit., pp. 212-214.]

2. Halévy, op. cit., p. 237.

statement; Lord Lansdowne in language slightly more veiled said the same thing when he urged the Lords to pass the Bill.[1]."

The same Labour pressure was felt in the case of Old Age Pensions. A few years after its enactment on a small scale Fenner Brockway wrote: "The first speech delivered from the Labour benches after the election was a plea for Old Age Pensions. The Liberal Government rejected it then and on more than one subsequent occasion. It was only when by-elections proved how popular the Labour Party was becoming in the country that you [i. e., the Liberal Government] began to think about the struggle of the aged poor."[2]

It was not only, however, by its successful pressure on the legislation of the Liberal Government that the Labour Party publicised the hesitant nature of the Government. Resolutions on behalf of the "Right to work", in favour of a "living wage" and other socialist causes were voted down by the Government, and the Labour Party made known its dissatisfaction. Many even among Government supporters were discontented and rebellious over the compromising nature of the Government's policies. Crisis came in 1909 when Lloyd George, elevated to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer upon Asquith's assumption of the Premiership the previous year, introduced his famous "War Budget", imposing taxes regarded as new and drastic, but not without a struggle in the Cabinet first being necessary. Lloyd George declared: "This is a war

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1. Ibid., p. 237.
2. Brockway, op. cit., p. 108.

budget; it is for raising money to wage implacable war against poverty and squalidness."[1] As is well known, the Lords audaciously rejected the Budget, and in January, 1910, Asquith dissolved Parliament and went again to the country.

The result of the election was astonishing when one considers the result of but four years before and the fact that the issue of "the Peers versus the People" was the most popular one which could possibly have been forced or found. Lloyd George led the campaigning up and down the country, but even his magnetic personality was powerless to avert the loss of over a hundred seats; with just over 270 seats each, the Liberal and Conservative Parties were virtually equal in Parliament. The Liberals with the support of the Irish and Labour still governed, but they had won fewer votes in the country than the Conservatives and were now very perilously placed.[2] Sir Charles Trevelyan, at the time a Liberal and a supporter of the Government later wrote: ". . . The Liberal Government of 1906 . . . made no great break with the past . . . lost its opportunities because it had no decisive course which it must follow . . . never knew whether it could trust the country to back it against the reactionaries, and was finally only saved from failure by the aggressive statesmanship of Mr. Lloyd George and the reckless resistance of the House of Lords."[3]

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1. Spender, J. A.: Great Britain, Empire and Commonwealth, London, 1937, p. 360.
2. According to the Liberal Yearbook for 1910 the Liberal Party in Great Britain won just under 2,700,000 votes while the Unionists won 2,900,000 and another 150,000 in Ireland.
3. Trevelyan, /Sir/ Charles: From Liberalism to Labour, London, 1921, p. 63. Also see Appendix III.

Liberal prestige had declined sharply through the four years of the 1906 Government; another eyewitness of events, J. A. Spender, writes: "By the end of 1907 the spirits of the great Liberal majority were visibly drooping . . . . The Parliamentary session had disappointed many hopes."[1] Discussing the change of Premiership in 1908 Spender comments: "The general prognostication was that Asquith's reign would be short, and that it would coincide with a period of declining fortunes for the Liberal Party."[2]

Labour, despite the addition of the Miners' M.P.'s, won only 40 seats, but it put 85 candidates into the field and won about half a million votes. The number of Lib-Labs in Parliament was now reduced to six and very few other Lib-Lab candidates were put forward.

In December, 1910, a second General Election was fought, due to the recalcitrance of the Lords over the Parliament Bill. The distribution of seats remained about the same; both Liberals and Conservatives lost two seats while Labour rose to 42. The Labour Party's vote dropped below 400,000, but this was due to the fact that the Osborne judgement and the timing of the election so soon after its predecessor prevented the party from putting forward more than 62 candidates. The Liberal Party, however, again scored fewer votes than the

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1. Spender, J. A.: Great Britain, p. 316.
2. Ibid., pp. 320-1.

Conservatives, particularly in England; its total was 2,540,000 to the Conservatives' 2,920,000.[1]

After 1910 the plight of the Liberal Government grew steadily worse. Labour bills for employment maintenance and other causes were ignored. For some time the Government refused to modify or reverse the Osborne judgement of 1909, forbidding unions to use money for political purposes, and when it did enact legislation it was gravely displeasing to Labour. Troops were sent to various places [most notably to Tonypandy in 1910] during strikes, rousing the bitter antagonism of the trade unions. In 1912 the Government refused to concede the miners' minimum wages which were demanded by the union and even refused the establishment of the "five and the two", five shillings a day for colliers and two shillings for youths. Instead, minimum wage boards were set up in various areas: soon after their inception Fenner Brockway remarked of them: "They made their awards, and in nearly every district the minimum for adult workers was fixed at less than five shillings a day."[2] In 1911 a strike of the railways took place, and was for the first time in railway history observed throughout the country, and by virtually all the railwaymen. After three days the Government was forced to give way and urge increased wages upon

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1. These figures are from the Liberal Yearbook. The Conservative Constitutional Yearbook estimated that 2,290,110 Liberal votes were cast as against 2,426,681 for the Conservatives, a surprising disparity from the Liberal figure, but one which does not reverse the essential facts.
2. Brockway, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

the railway companies, but it then proceeded to propose in Parliament that the companies should be allowed to impose higher charges. Lloyd George's Insurance Acts in 1911, while dividing the Labour Party in Parliament, also aroused much bitterness among many workers who rejected the contributory principle of "ninepence for fourpence", preferring the non-contributory "ninepence for nothing".

In fact, the Liberal Government after 1910 was sitting on a powder-keg which threatened ever more menacingly to blow up.[1] There were three main sources of concern. First was the revolt of the militant suffragettes, whose campaign for "votes for women" took violent form and was severely embarrassing to the Liberals, many of whom supported the demand for female suffrage. Second was the revolt of the Unionist Party, whose opposition to Home Rule [a third Liberal Bill for which was engaged in 1912-1914 in passing through the House of Lords under the mechanism of the Parliament Act] was stronger than ever, and which took the form of several rebellious acts and many rebellious utterances in the years immediately before the outbreak of the Great War. Finally, the working-class was growing ever more militant, far more so than its leaders in Parliament, and strikes and violence, often led by syndicalists, increased greatly. In 1912, for instance, there were

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1. The best accounts of the 1910-1914 years are to be found in Halévy's <u>History of the English People, 1905-1914</u>, and George Dangerfield's <u>The Strange Death of Liberal England</u>.

857 trade disputes involving 1,233,016 workers and the loss of almost forty million working days, an unheard of total for those days.[1] Hálevy writes of the triple challenge facing Liberalism on the eve of the war in 1914: (1) the suffragettes. "A painful conflict was in process between British toleration and the fanaticism of the suffragettes . . . . The evil certainly showed no sign of diminution in July, 1914. Never had acts of violence and incendiarism been more frequent . . ." (2) the Unionists. "At the very moment when civil war seemed to have broken out in Ireland, Irish affairs became no more than an almost negligible episode in the tremendous struggle which was beginning and which would array in mortal combat the nations and races of the globe . . ." (3) the workers. "The Triple Industrial Alliance . . . had been founded and . . . if on December 1 the railwaymen did not obtain from the Companies the concessions for which they were asking, the country was faced with the prospect of a strike of two million allied workmen in a position to involve its entire industry in stagnation and chaos . . . . On July 17, 1914, Lloyd George . . . admitted the gravity of the threat which hung over the nation . . . . If . . . the insurrection

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1. Dangerfield, George: The Strange Death of Liberal England, London, 1936, p. 296. The Government possessed conciliation machinery which was tried to its limits, but it was really prevented from action by lack of knowledge of working-class conditions and by lack of sympathy; in 1912, at the height of industrial unrest, the chief measures considered in the House of Commons were the tired Radical causes of Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment.

of labour should coincide with the Irish rebellion which . . . everyone feared, 'the situation will be the gravest with which any government has had to deal for centuries.'"[1]

It is incontestable that it was the war which caused the rapid decline and effective demise of the Liberal Party. G. D. H. Cole, the leading contemporary historian of the early Labour Party, writes: "Even in 1914 the Labour political machine existed effectively in only a small number of areas. Most of the rural and many of the mining areas were still unorganised, either by the I.L.P. or by the Labour Party . . . . Over most of the country, the Liberals and the Conservatives still fought for political predominance without regarding Labour as a serious rival."[2] In most places the old loyalties still tied many militant groups to the Liberal Party; the Nonconformists, the Radical middle classes, and many of the working classes who still retained their traditional loyalty to Liberalism and were reluctant to change over to a new, inexperienced party. For all its mistakes and ineptness, for all the neglect it had shown of crucial social problems, the Liberal Party could still point to a glorious tradition and significant legislation; finally, Lloyd George prominently kept aloft the banner of latter-day Social Radicalism. With his attacks on "Dukes" and owners of landed wealth Lloyd George succeeded

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1. Halevy, op. cit., p. 518, p. 556, p. 478.

2. Cole, G. D. H.: British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914, London, 1941, pp. 233-4.

in identifying himself with the demand for a juster society in the minds of many of the labouring poor. The Labour Party, on the other hand, was identified in many circles between 1906 and 1914 as being merely the left wing of the Liberal Party, and was gravely hampered after 1910 by having to act as allies of the Liberals so as to keep in office a Government which it preferred to the Tories. After 1910, moreover, it won no by-elections, despite 14 attempts.

And yet . . . despite the apparent strength of the Liberal Party in 1914 its position was very shaky, and, relative to the Labour Party, growing steadily weaker. We have seen that violence had already taken place in three different spheres and that civil war was threatening. We have seen, most significantly, that an aroused working class was resorting to industrial action and travelling ever further from the peaceful, non-militant shibboleths of Liberalism. In ten years the Labour Party had increased its affiliated membership from 375,000 to over 1,400,000, its representation from 2 to 42 and its voting strength almost ten-fold,[1] while the Liberal poll had shrunk. The process of the replacement of the Liberal by the Labour Party would have been slower without the war, but it would certainly have taken place nonetheless. Measures such as the Miners' Eight Hour day and Payment of Members, for both of which Labour had been agitating since 1890 might now be enacted, but they were enacted too late. It was seen that

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1. From 1900 to January [not December], 1910.

they had been won from the Liberal Party after a battle of twenty years and Labour drew the moral from the fact that it took two score Labour M.P.'s to secure their passage. Halévy writes of the discontent of the workers after 1910: "The little they obtained only encouraged them to demand far more. They observed that of all the measures passed up to 1911 only one, the Act of 1909 on Trade Boards, dealt with the question of wages, and it was a very timid measure . . . . But it was the question of wages which . . . interested more than any other the working class."[1] Labour noticed, moreover, that [as Fenner Brockway wrote] the taxes in the Lloyd George Budget of 1909 did little to halt the unearned increment in land values and that the party which had denounced the Peers at elections appointed 80 of them before 1914. Fenner Brockway estimated that at the election of December, 1910, the Liberal members returned consisted of:

Barristers and Solicitors	73
Employers	113
Army and Navy Officers	16
Journalists	8
Landowners	15
Heirs to Peerages	12
Financiers	9
Workers	4
Miscellaneous	15
	265

Dangerfield sums up the composition before 1914 of the Liberal Party: "It was an irrational mixture of Whig aristocrats, industrialists, dissenters, reformers, trade unionists,

1. Halévy, op. cit., p. 440.

quacks, and Mr. Lloyd George; it preserved itself from the destructive contradictions of daily reality by an almost mythical communion with the doctrine of laissez-faire and a profound belief in the English virtue of compromise."[1] This conglomeration of saints and Satans could no longer be the vehicle for action of the organised working classes.

But the war came and with it the fortunes of the Liberal Party took a disastrous turn. It is undoubtedly true that a party of its nature required an unhurried, temperate [in short, liberal] atmosphere which the exigencies of the Great War swept away, apparently permanently.[2] But the effects of the war were deepened by the inter- and intra-party schisms and schemes which in late December, 1916, resulted in the removal from the leadership of what had become a Coalition Government of Asquith and his replacement by Lloyd George. The resultant split in the Liberal Party was more severe than any which the party had known in the past, in part because the cause of divergence was almost entirely personal and because the two persons involved were the foremost Liberal leaders. Asquith's adherents bitterly resented the charges that his leadership had been lax to the point of apathy and that Lloyd George was the only man who could "win the war". The quarrel smouldered for over a year and burst into bright

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1. Dangerfield, _op. cit._, p. 68. Also see Appendix III.
2. Dr. Gilbert Murray made this point to the writer in the interview discussed in Appendix IV.

flame in May, 1918, when Major-General Maurice challenged a statement of Lloyd Goerge's that the British army in France had been stronger in March [at the time of the last German offensive] than a year before. Asquith, who was acting as Leader of the Opposition, asked for a Select Committee of the House to consider the charge, but the Government refused. One hundred and five Liberals voted in favour of Asquith's motion and these 105 were to become marked men. When Lloyd George and Bonar Law, the Conservative who was his chief ally in the Coalition Government, determined upon an immediate election after the war's end, they also decided that the Coalition must continue to face the tasks of peace as it had already faced those of war. By default most of the Coalition candidates were Conservatives, for Lloyd George had no organisation and a relatively small number of supporters. All the Liberals who had supported Asquith in the Maurice debate or who, as Liberal candidates, announced their support for him, were opposed by Government nominees who were sent a certificate of approval, dubbed, by Asquith, "the coupon". Thus was fought the famous "coupon election", and the conditions under which it was fought, with such slogans as "Hang the Kaiser" and "Asquith nearly lost you the war, will you let him lose the peace?"[1] could hardly have resulted otherwise than in a Coalition landslide.

The result was disaster for the Liberal Party; handfuls

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1. Spender, Great Britain, p. 579.

of its seats were given to the Conservatives and it never recovered. Five hundred and twenty-six supporters of the Coalition were returned as against 60 Labour members and only 33 Asquith Liberals. Labour had increased its vote to 2·2 million, and while the two Liberal factions together polled 2·8 million votes, half of them went to the Government and only 1·4 million to the Asquith faction. One hundred and thirty-seven Lloyd George Liberals were returned, but they were swallowed up by almost 400 Conservatives, including the serried ranks of businessmen whom Keynes memorably described as "hard-faced men who looked as if they had done well out of the war." Asquith himself lost his seat and the independent Liberals were left leaderless. Moreover, by joining in a peacetime election with the Conservatives Lloyd George had irreparably damaged the standing of the Liberals with the Labour Party, all the more as he had been so popular and dynamic as a Radical leader. J. M. Robertson, formerly a Liberal Minister, wrote in 1923 of the 1918 election: "If there was one thing that the Conspiracy was as much concerned about as the wrecking of Liberalism, it was the baffling of the Labour Party; and the deliberate identification of that with the 'Bolshevist menace' was the most wanton incitement to class hatred that had been put forward in England in modern times on the professed side of law and order."[1] Disgusted

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1. Robertson, J. M.: Mr. Lloyd George and Liberalism, London, 1923, p. 94.

and discouraged by the decline and debasement of Radicalism, many prominent Liberals issued public recantations and joined thd Labour Party. Liberals of note who left the Liberal Party and were members of one or other of the two minority Labour Governments in the 'twenties included Lord Haldane, Sir Charles Trevelyan, Noel Buxton, J. C. Wedgwood, W. Wedgwood Benn /Lord Stansgate/, H. B. Lees-Smith, Lord Arnold, Lord Jowitt, Lord Addison, and Lord Ponsonby. This exodus began soon after the end of the war and continued through the 'twenties. Moreover, the Labour Party had in 1918 adopted both a new, specifically Socialist constitution and a new organisation which promised soon to enable it to become a mass party, a promise quickly fulfilled.

The Lloyd George coalition ended due to a Conservative revolt in 1922 and an election followed. Lloyd George, now deserted by his Conservative allies and shortly to become an ordinary M.P. after seventeen consecutive years of Cabinet Office,[1] did not unite his forces with the Asquith faction. Spender comments: "Whether 'National /i.e., Lloyd George/ Liberals' should be opposed by Independent Liberals was a question which in general was left to the local Associations, who answered it in the affirmative in a large number of constituencies."[2] Altogether the two Liberal groups won 120 seats of which rather over half went to the Asquithians. The

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1. A modern record of longevity.
2. Spender and Asquith, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 339.

two factions won 4·2 million votes, but the united Labour Party scored slightly more and with 142 M.P.'s claimed and won the right to act as the official Opposition in a way which it could not do in 1918 with 60 members. In the election of 1923, called by Baldwin to decide upon the issue of tariff reform, the Liberal Party at last rallied together to defend the somewhat tattered banner of Free Trade, and the united party, again under Asquith's leadership, fared much better at the polls. So, however, did the Labour Party. With 4·3 million votes the Liberals returned 158 M.P.'s, but with again only slightly more votes Labour returned 191 members and for the first time, with Liberal support, formed a Government. Eighteen short years after the landslide of 1906 the Labour Party had become the Government and the Liberal Party, even in one of its "good" years, was relegated to the undignified position of being its supporter. But ten years before, 42 Labour M.P.'s had helped to sustain a Liberal Government with over 270 Liberals in the House of Commons.

Although Lloyd George had rejoined the fold, harmony was still not apparent within the Liberal ranks. There was natural resentment against the man who had done more than any individual in the twentieth century to destroy the Liberal Party, and there was also opposition to Lloyd George because of the "fund" which he had amassed from his supporters during the coalition years and which he refused to turn over to the Liberal Party for general purposes. Thus the impoverished party had to come to

him, cap in hand, to request money, an unsavoury procedure. But the antagonism which was the cause of gravest concern was that between Whig and Radical, the ancient cleavage which still endured into the nineteen-twenties. The Liberal businessmen who surrounded Asquith were strongly opposed to the series of policy statements which Lloyd George engaged in drawing up after his return to the party and which were popular with Radicals and caught public notice. In 1926 Ramsay Muir wrote in the Contemporary Review: "There is, in the depleted ranks of the Liberal Party today, as there always has been in the past, a strong and growing Radical element . . . . Many of those who should today be the rank and file of this Radical army have gone over to the Labour Party, in sheer impatience at the impotently negative attitude which official Liberalism seems to have adopted."[1]

Lloyd George's first report, Coal and Power, undertaken in conjunction with many Radicals, was issued in 1924 and advocated nationalisation of mining royalties and the establishment of a welfare fund in the coal industry which would encourage the more efficient running of the industry. It also proposed electrical commissioners to grant monopolies of electric power, public and private, in various areas. But these measures, which fell between capitalism and socialism, were not popular with the official leadership. Muir commented: "'Coal

1. Contemporary Review, vol. 130, July, 1926, p. 7.

and Power' was labelled as a Lloyd George scheme, and the official party gave it the cold shoulder . . ."[1] The next report was a Land Enquiry which, Muir said, was undertaken by Lloyd George with the aid of some of the Radicals who had opposed him most bitterly several years before. It proposed that the State should buy land for agricultural tenants who would thus become state employees, and that urban land values should be heavily taxed. Muir wrote: "There were, of course, differences of opinion on the Land scheme. It nearly split the party. The old leaders of the coalition, except Lord Oxford [i.e., Asquith, who had accepted a peerage in 1925], were either tacit or open opponents: some of them frankly hoped that it would result in the expulsion of Mr. Lloyd George from the party."[2]

The report was finally adopted by the Liberal Party, but not without modifications and not before it had suffered crushing defeat in the election of 1924. From its 4.3 million votes in 1923 it declined to 3·0 million, in large part because, due to local anti-Labour pacts with the Conservatives, [tacitly endorsed by some of the conservative Liberal national leaders; this was the famous "Red Letter Election"], it put forward more than 100 fewer candidates than it had done in 1923. Only 42 Liberals were returned to Westminster; Labour, on the other hand, while declining in seats to 152 raised its

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1. Ibid., p. 9.
2. Ibid., p. 9.

poll by over a million to 5·5 million.

The General Strike, which took place in 1926, was the occasion of the last great dispute between Asquith and Lloyd George. The former, backed by most of the other Liberal leaders, denounced the Strike, and Lloyd George incurred his wrath by absenting himself from a party meeting held to discuss the subject and by making known in the American press his sympathy with the strikers. Asquith thereupon wrote a letter to Lloyd George which he subsequently published, denouncing the latter's attitude over the whole affair. Shortly afterwards [June 1, 1926], the twelve members of the Liberal "Shadow Cabinet" [who included Viscount Grey but no other Cabinet Minister of 1906] endorsed Asquith's action in a letter which they sent to the Times. Many Liberals regarded the matter as another attack by Whigs upon Radicalism, and agreed with Ramsay Muir, who wrote: "I cannot help feeling that, subconsciously, the advisers whom he [i.e., Asquith] trusts were exasperated by the evident growth of Mr. Lloyd George's influence among the more Radical and Progressive elements of the party, and were glad to seize what seemed to them a favourable opportunity for getting rid of him."[1]

Asquith, now nearing 75, soon after retired from the Liberal leadership, but harmony among Liberals did not follow. The series of policy statements was continued, and a dazzling team of Liberal thinkers and economists which included Lord

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1. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Layton, J. M. Keynes, Herbert Samuel, Ramsay Muir, Charles Masterman, Philip Kerr, Lloyd George himself and others, was gathered to draw up a definitive Liberal programme. The result of the research and re-thinking was published in 1928 in a book of over 500 pages entitled Britain's Economic Future, but popularly known because of the colour of its cover, as the Liberal Yellow Book. It proposed for industry as a whole what had already been put forward for coal and power; boards to be set up to advise and control private industry, certain industries to be run by public agencies, the establishment of an economic general staff, and the general supervision by the State of private industry. Just before the election of 1929 another report was published; it was entitled We Can Conquer Unemployment, and advocated [in a manner which would now be called Keynesian] the installation of a massive programme of public works, deficit financing and a vigorous state initiative in many fields to resuscitate the unhealthy national economy. This report was widely publicised and sold by the hundreds of thousands; together it and the Yellow Book put to the public a progressive policy which the Labour Party, torn by its own divisions and lack of leadership, could scarcely match.

But it was now far too late. Though 512 Liberal candidates were put forward in 1929 as compared with 343 in 1924, only 59 were elected, and the Liberal Party polled 5·3 million

votes

votes[1] against Labour's 288 M.P.'s and 8.4 million votes. In the 1929-31 Parliament the Liberal Party again acted as the supporter of a minority Labour Government, but was itself racked by dissensions. Lord Samuel, one of the most prominent Liberals in Parliament, wrote in later years: "our weekly meetings were not happy occasions. About a third of our body, including some of the leading figures - Simon, Runciman and Donald MacLean - were profoundly distrustful of Lloyd George. Another third, including the Welsh members, were definitely his adherents. The remainder, of whom I was one, tried to keep the party together and to guide it along what seemed to us right lines of policy."[2] In June, 1931, Sir John Simon and several other Liberal M.P.'s withdrew from the party whip and this action was followed by Lloyd George's illness and temporary withdrawal from active politics. For all intents and purposes the Liberal Party was destroyed by the General Election of 1931, in which 72 Liberals were elected, all but four of whom /Lloyd George and members of his family/ were supporters of the new Coalition which governed until 1940. Many of them never returned to the Liberal Party and the party's independent parliamentary strength has remained minute from that day until this.

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Here we may leave the fragmentary Liberal Party, still

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1. This was the highest number of votes polled in Liberal history.
2. Samuel /Sir/ Herbert /Lord/: Memoirs, London, 1945, p. 200.

squabbling amidst the ruins, and return to ponder over the main causes of the Liberal decline which we have found to be of great importance in the 1880-1900 period, when the party retained apparent strength. We have found and discussed three main causes of the Liberal decline. The first was the Irish crisis which dogged the party continually in these years. It was the cause of the defection of most of the Whig aristocracy from Liberalism, but that desertion was bound to come in any event and was only hastened a very little by the Home Rule crisis. Far more important, it caused the defection of Joseph Chamberlain and some of his supporters from the Liberal Party and left the party with no acknowledged leader to propagate the gospel of Social Radicalism, particularly as a divorce case simultaneously removed Sir Charles Dilke from a position of leadership. For years Home Rule occupied the foreground of the Liberal programme, and the party's venerable leader, Mr. Gladstone, refused to make way for the growing sentiment of Radicals and workingmen for social reform. Moreover, the Parnell divorce case and the inevitable letdown in public support for Home Rule which followed helped to make the Irish cause as much a burden as a help to the Liberal Party. The Irish crisis divided Liberals in the 1892-95 Liberal Governments and in the Opposition years which followed; it also acted as a catalyst in persuading the working class, which had no burning interest in Home Rule, to form its own party. At all times Ireland thus served to confuse, hinder and divide the Liberal Party.

The second great cause of the Liberal decline in the years 1880-1900 was the division in the party over Imperialism. While this division had a certain importance during the Gladstone Government of 1880-1885 [and while imperial affairs, notably in the case of Gordon and Khartoum, harmed the Government], it did not assume major significance until the popularity of Imperialism became great in the early 1890's. It injured the Liberal Cabinets and the Liberal Party in Parliament severely in the Government years of 1892-95 and almost brought down the Government upon more than one occasion. In the Opposition years, 1895-1900, it became even more serious and culminated in the party crisis over the Boer War. Some Liberals strongly supported Chamberlain and the Unionist Government over the South African issues which ended in war and also favoured a generally militant and aggressive foreign and imperial policy, while many others, including a majority in the party, retained the Gladstonian tradition of Liberalism which opposed intervention in foreign affairs and an advanced imperialism. The traditions of Palmerston and Gladstone were embattled after their deaths, and the result was that the Liberal Party was an easy prey to Unionist opportunism in the General Election of 1900. Moreover, those of the party leaders who tended to be progressive in domestic affairs were strongly Imperialist and alienated a large section of the working-class leadership over the war; many of those who left the Liberal Party for this reason never came back, but

went over to support the newly-formed Labour Representation Committee.

Far and away the most important cause of the Liberal decline, however, was the failure of the party to take up the social reforms which came to be of increasing importance to the militants both among the middle classes and in the working-class movement. We have seen that Joseph Chamberlain left the party over the Home Rule issue; he was also exasperated by the unwillingness of the party leaders, Gladstone in particular, to adopt the progressive reforms for which he had campaigned for over a decade, most notably in 1885. But the leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1880's did not consist of men who were receptive to the new ideas and causes which Chamberlain so ardently protected. The Whig element, a large and strongly influential group before 1886, was as aristocratic in its origins and associations as any Conservative group, and in fact was more exclusive and snobbish in its attitude towards the successful middle-class businessmen whom Chamberlain typified than were the farsighted Tory leaders. Others among the Liberal leaders, including Gladstone, were aristocratic by association if not by birth, and were far removed from an understanding of the social problems which Chamberlain brought to public attention as they had never been brought before. Rightly the Liberal leaders feared that the results of Chamberlain's agitation would mean the loss of their own privileged positions, and they fought him in the

party as hard as the Conservatives from without. Moreover, the Conservatives had and retained a tradition of "Tory Democracy", more favourable to certain social reforms than were the main Liberal and Radical traditions. This fact had been revealed by the social reforms of the 1874-1880 Conservative Government, which were far more extensive than anything adopted by its Liberal predecessor or successor. It was thus in part a protest against the conservatism of Gladstone and other Liberal leaders that caused Chamberlain's defection and made him league with the Conservatives.

But this aristocratic Liberal tradition did not end in 1886. Writing in 1922, Margot Asquith reminisced that "when Mr. Gladstone went in for Home Rule, society was rent from top to bottom, and even the most devoted friends quarreled over it . . ."[1] But the political division was not apparent in high "Society": ". . . At our house in Grosvenor Square and later in those of the Souls everyone [sic] met - Randolph Churchill, Gladstone, Asquith, Morley, Chamberlain, Balfour, Rosebery, Salisbury, Hartington, Harcourt . . ."[2] This is to cite but one evidence of the undoubted fact that Liberals and Conservatives who became party leaders came largely from the same class;[3] Liberal and Conservative leaders were all

1. Asquith, Margot, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 118.
2. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 120.
3. Significantly, Mrs. Asquith implied that this social homogeneity was unknown elsewhere: "Our decision not to sacrifice private friendship to public politics was envied in every capital in Europe. It made London the [illegible]

likely to be aristocrats, professional men or "Captains of industry", and though there was a great exodus of the propertied classes from the Liberal to the Conservative Party in the years of our survey the leadership of the Liberal Party showed no significant change in character. In Parliament Libérals were scarcely less plutocratic than Conservatives, and the challenge to the Liberal leadership by working-class militants was ignored almost as much as it was opposed. Those Liberals who became party leaders before 1900 were not opposed to working-class advances or to high wages and full employment. They were men of good will who for the most part believed in the political freedoms which it had been the historic function of Liberalism to bring into existence and which remain its greatest glory. But being men of wealth and leisure at a time when the mass of their fellow countrymen lived in unspeakable and unpardonable misery they were not the men to become leaders in a drive to remove the poverty and insecurity of existence then so prevalent. There was always a "we" and "they" dichotomy between the Liberal leadership and the working-class voters who kept them in power or in prominence, and there was no attempt or even desire on the part of the Liberal leaders to change this circumstance. Politics were not for them

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capital in Europe. It made London the centre of the most interesting society in the world." /Ibid., vol. 1, p. 120./ Then: "There is no individual or group among us powerful enough to succeed in forming a salon of this kind today." /Ibid., vol. 1, p. 120./ Typically, her thought was still of individuals, not of social classes.

about property or social class; vague "economic laws" had put them where they were and degraded the living conditions of the working classes, and these laws could only be modified, not changed; the basic allegiance to the shibboleths of the classical economists remained. Men's convictions and tastes are shaped by their associations; having little knowledge of working-class conditions the Liberal leaders did not wish to change them, and what seems to a later age unbelievable callousness to the crying needs of their age seemed to them natural and unchangeable. This is why any social reform policies [specifically the Newcastle Programme] accepted by Gladstone, Morley, Harcourt, Rosebery, Asquith, Trevelyan, Shaw-Lefevre, Kimberley and other leaders who composed the party's spokesmen seemed hollow and in fact meant little in practice. It is why group interests and political "fads" came increasingly to dominate the party programme. It is why the three issues of burning importance to the working-class leadership in the 1890's: many more Labour parliamentary candidates, an Eight-Hours law [at least for miners], and Payment of Members, were neglected by the Liberals to their own disaster. None of these issues, not even Eight Hours [which had been adopted on the Continent and in Great Britain as a prominent Socialist policy] was in any way Socialist in theory; had the Liberals adopted them and had they strived to enact social welfare measures of lasting importance in their Governments of 1892-95 they would

unquestionably have preserved for their party a longer and more bountiful life.

But to adopt a programme of social policies which, while not Socialist, would nonetheless have been basically ameliorative of the conditions of life of the great mass of the nation, was not possible for the Liberal Party as it was constructed in the crucial years 1880-1900. If ever a party was destroyed by its own contradictions, if ever the Marxian analysis was valid, it was in the case of the Liberal Party. The measures of political freedom which Liberalism had brought were bound to mean that attention would be turned to economic and social issues, but this was a predicament which the Liberals could not solve. Harold Laski said of them: "They did not understand that in any society where economic power is possessed by a small part of the population, there cannot be the effective enjoyment of the many . . . . Liberalism . . . came as a doctrine of negation . . . . When it discovered that the right to Liberty of contract which was its central affirmation still left great masses in poverty and ignorance, it approached the changed world timidly. It refused to confront squarely the fact that this changed world demanded, especially in the economic realm, massive social controls if the freedom it deemed the supreme good was to have any meaning in the lives of the multitude . . . . It embarked upon half-hearted concessions; it did not examine its constitutive principle."[1]

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1. Laski, Harold J. *The Decline of Liberalism* [lecture], London, 1940, pp. 14-15, 21.

Harold Langshaw observes: "There was a sincerity and intellectual breadth in nineteenth century Liberalism which make its social and political achievements now seem poor . . . . There was no adequate effort to make social life correspond to the principles avowed."[1]

Had there been no elements in the Liberal Party which strove to right the balance, to include within the party programme certain broad social commitments, it would have come to an end far sooner than it did. In fact, there were always Liberals who were advocates of advanced social schemes, even after Chamberlain's departure, though increasingly they were unable to specify their policies into detailed political proposals. But there was no organisation within the party other than the official leadership which could decide what Liberalism was, and the leaders kept a grip over policy remarkable in the history of political parties, specially remarkable in the case of a party which proclaimed itself to be progressive. Gladstone had almost always a final veto, and even after his departure in 1894 there was only a tiny group of men who could speak with authority for the Liberal Party.[2] The resolutions of the National Liberal Federation, even the celebrated Newcastle Programme, were honoured largely in the breach. On

1. Langshaw, Harold: J.: Socialism and the Historic Function of Liberalism, London, 1925, pp. 60-1.
2. Their quarrels and mutual antipathies further hindered the evolution and enaction of progressive new policies.

the other hand, party discipline was lax to an extreme; no one was ever expelled from the Liberal Party; no Liberal had to believe in anything other than Free Trade and Home Rule, and there was a wide leeway on the latter point.[1] But no matter how many adherents of a social programme might agitate within the party, the Social Radical section never rose to the ascendancy until too late. Lloyd George was the first and only Liberal leader after Chamberlain to be of a different background from the others and to understand the aspersions of the militants among the working class, but he was not prominent among the leaders of the Liberal Party until after 1900. There were seven General Elections in the 1880-1900 period; in every one except that of 1892 the Liberal Party was openly divided over issues of major importance when it went to the country, and in 1892 the divisions lay just beneath the surface. The electorate was bound to reject a party which seemed to grow less and less capable of any real action and to stand for nothing but platitudes. The divisions continued late into the new century and resulted finally in the party's destruction; at no time could any one faction seize authoritative control over the party's organisation and programme. The Liberal Party was in essence always a coalition, more so than other parties, and a coalition whose leaders were

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1. In any event it was a vital part of the Liberal gospel in its pure form only from 1886 to 1894.

opposed to effective social and economic measures at the crucial times. It was successful in an age which did not demand strong parties or basic social change; when, in the 1880's, these demands awoke and arose its decline and eventual demise were inevitable.

APPENDIX I - ELECTION ANALYSES

The figures which follow concern the six elections of 1880, 1885, 1886, 1892, 1895 and 1900. They do not pretend to be inclusive, but rather give a suggestion of some of the more important statistical results of the elections.

1. 1880. Figures for 1880 are hard come by and conflicting. The Annual Register, for example, estimates 349 Liberals, 243 Conservatives, and 60 Home Rulers; the Quarterly Review says 353, 237, and 62, the Pall Mall Gazette 354, 237, and 61. Culled from a variety of sources, the most reliable estimates of the 652 seats appear to be:

London - 22 seats

Liberals	14
Conservatives	8

English Counties - 172 seats

Liberals	54
Conservatives	118

Welsh Counties - 15 seats

Liberals	13
Conservatives	2

Scottish Counties - 32 seats

Liberals	26
Conservatives	6

English Boroughs - 265 seats

Liberals	188
Conservatives	77

Welsh Boroughs - 15 seats

Liberals	15
Conservatives	-

Scottish Boroughs - 28 seats

Liberals	27
Conservatives	1

Ireland - 103 seats

Liberals	17
Conservatives	25
Home Rulers	61

Liberals -	354
Conservatives -	237
Home Rulers -	61

Popular vote was:

Liberals (including Home Rule vote) - 1,877,296 - increase 31 per cent. ~~3190.~~

Conservatives - 1,412,596 - increase 16 per cent. ~~1690.~~

The Liberals gained a net total of 43 seats in the British counties and almost 60 in the British boroughs. It was the last time in the nineteenth century that they won a majority in London or in the English boroughs.

2. 1885. Parliament, now reformed, was elected by a larger [by two million] electorate, and possessed 670 members, instead of 652. Constituencies were markedly changed. University seats are counted as boroughs.

England		Conservative (seats)	Liberal (seats)	Conservative (votes)	Liberal (votes)
62 seats	London	36	26	193,186	172,384
168 "	Boroughs	84	84*	519,004	556,962
234 "	Counties	100	134	954,053	1,113,693

* one to a Home Ruler

Wales		Conservative	Liberal	Conservative	Liberal
11 seats	Boroughs	2	9	included in	above
19 "	Counties	1	18	" "	"

Scotland		Conservative	Liberal	Conservative	Liberal
33 seats	Burghs	1	32	61,207	126,959
39 "	Counties	7	32	101,647	156,920

Ireland: 85 Home Rulers, 18 Conservatives

Totals:

Seats:		Liberal	Conservative
	England	244	220
	Wales	27	3
	Scotland	64	8
		335	231 + 18 Irish Conservatives = 249

		Popular vote: (ex. Ireland)		
Liberals	335		Liberals	2,126,918
Conservatives	249		Conservatives	1,822,834
Home Rulers	86			

Especially notable are the borough gains of the Conservatives, especially in London, the county gains of the Liberals,

their tight hold on Wales and Scotland, and the Home Ruler success. The Liberals never again in the nineteenth century won so many votes; they never again were to carry London or England as a whole, except in 1906.

3. 1886. Again [and henceforth] University seats are counted as boroughs; the 1 Irish Home Ruler representing an English borough is not tabulated.

England	Unionist (seats)	Liberal (seats)	Unionist (votes)	Liberal (votes)
London	51	11	162,081	118,901
Boroughs	120	48	421,618	410,110
Counties	169	65	573,613	524,508
Wales	**Unionist**	**Liberal**	**Unionist**	**Liberal**
Boroughs	4	7	included in	above
Counties	3	16	"	" "
Scotland	**Unionist**	**Liberal**	**Unionist**	**Liberal**
Burghs	11	22	69,480	81,575
Counties	18	21	90,097	95,382

Ireland: Home Rulers 85
Unionists 18

Totals:

Seats:		Unionist	Liberal
	England	340	124
	Wales	6	24
	Scotland	29	43
		375	191

Unionists 393 (74 Liberal Unionists)

Liberals 191)
Home Rulers 86) 277

Popular vote in Great Britain

Unionists 1,316,993
Liberals 1,236,741

Specially notable are the great Unionist triumph on a lower vote and a close vote; their great gains continued in the boroughs, but also in the counties and in Scotland,

~~Ireland,~~ and Wales.

Seats gained by Unionists:

England		
	Boroughs, inc. London	51
	Counties	69
Wales		3
Scotland		21
		144

4. 1892.

England	Unionist (seats)	Liberal (seats)	Unionist (votes)	Liberal (votes)
London	37	25	228,933	191,012
Boroughs	100	68*	1,613,034	1,529,320
Counties	131	103		

* one to a Home Ruler

Wales	Unionist	Liberal	Unionist	Liberal
Boroughs	2	9	73,904	125,600
Counties	-	19		

Scotland	Unionist	Liberal	Unionist	Liberal
Burghs	10	23	223,571	259,519
Counties	12	27		

Ireland: Home Rulers 80
Unionists 23

Totals:

Seats:	Unionist	Liberal
England	268	196
Wales	2	28
Scotland	22	50
	292	274

Unionists	315	
Liberals	274	355
Irish	81	

Popular vote in Great Britain

Unionists	2,139,502
Liberals	2,105,451

Seats gained by Unionists:

Ireland 5

Seats gained by Liberals:

England	72	(Boroughs 34, Counties 38)
Wales	4	
Scotland	7	
	83	

Especially notable are the facts that even in this year the Liberals could not win in England, particularly in the boroughs, and that in both seats and votes in Great Britain they were behind the Unionists.

5. 1895.

England	Unionist (seats)	Liberal (seats)	Unionist (votes)	Liberal (votes)
London	54	8	250,146	167,150
Boroughs	126	42*	1,692,259	1,472,561
Counties	168	66		

* one to a Home Ruler

Wales	Unionist	Liberal	Unionist	Liberal
Boroughs	6	5	92,129	125,353
Counties	2	17		

Scotland	Unionist	Liberal	Unionist	Liberal
Burghs	16	17	233,021	247,519
Counties	17	22		

Ireland: Home Rulers 81
Unionists 22

Totals:

Seats:	Unionist	Liberal
England	348	116
Wales	8	22
Scotland	33	39
	389	177

Unionists 411
Liberals 177 } 259
Irish 82 }

Popular vote in Great Britain

Unionists 2,267,555
Liberals 2,012,583

Seats gained by Unionists:

England	80	(Boroughs 43) (Counties 39)
Wales	6	
Scotland	11	
	97	

With a slightly changed popular vote the Unionists swept to a landslide, again notably in England, where they now held three-fourths of the seats. Their popular vote in England, however, was only 402,694 greater; 1,942,405 to 1,539,711. One must, however, take into account that the Liberals did not contest 134 seats, while only ten were unchallenged by Unionists.

6. 1900.

England	Unionist (seats)	Liberal (seats)	Unionist (Votes)	Liberal (votes)
London	54	8	253,896	161,918
Boroughs)	284	118	641,627	538,650
Counties)			1,116,076	964,271
Wales	**Unionist**	**Liberal**	**Unionist**	**Liberal**
	4	26	89,948	137,220
Scotland	**Unionist**	**Liberal**	**Unionist**	**Liberal**
	38	34	257,444	253,029

Ireland: Home Rulers 81
Unionists 22

Totals:

Seats:		Unionist	Liberal
	England	338	126
	Wales	4	26
	Scotland	38	34
		380	186

Unionists	402	
Liberals	186)	268
Irish	82)	

Popular vote in Great Britain

Unionists 2,360,852
Liberals 2,055,951

Seats gained:			
	Unionists	Scotland	5
	Liberals	England	10
		Wales	4
	Total Liberal gain		9

The Unionist majority fell only slightly, and their popular vote increased more than did the Liberals.' While the Liberals gained ten English seats, those were in the counties, not the boroughs. For the first time since 1832 Scotland went Unionist, i.e. non-Liberal.

NOTE: At this time figures tended to vary from authority to authority, and not always to match the correct totals. Therefore the seat totals are not in every case exact. Figures for 1880 come from the Pall Mall Gazette, Quarterly Review, Fortnightly Review, and Annual Register, all others come from the Annual Register, supplemented, in 1895 and 1900, by Whitaker's Almanack.

APPENDIX II

On December 19, 1955, Lord Samuel, a leading Liberal statesman from before the first World War to the present day, kindly granted me a 40-minute interview in which we discussed the general subject of this thesis. While we ranged over the whole period, we centred on three topics, the remarks of Lord Samuel on which I set out below.

1. Why did the working classes tend to leave the Liberal Party? There were two specific answers to this question, Lord Samuel felt. One was the failure of the party to take up specific issues about which the working classes felt strongly. Specifically there were agitations for Eight Hours and Payment of Members, particularly the former. "You students from the School of Economics," Lord Samuel commented, "tend to overemphasise the importance of books. The working classes didn't read books about politics. You found out about these problems by talking to them in the shop, in their homes, or in the streets." It was the practical question of their economic well-being which mattered to them, and Lord Samuel inferred that the Liberal Party did not take up these practical questions fast enough to suit many workingmen.

The other answer was the predominance of the Liberal manufacturers and businessmen in the local constituency parties. Lord Samuel drew a clear line

between the young Liberal collectivists - like himself - in London, affected by the Fabians and other collectivist thinkers, and the managers of the local parties who did not read Fabian Essays or discuss intellectual problems. He pointed out that the well-to-do predominated almost everywhere in the running of the local parties, that they welcomed working-class support but wanted to have their own class in Parliament, and that, specially after 1885, the working classes came more and more to possess the numerical majorities in the local parties. This disparity, this antagonism between the businessman and the worker increased with the years, particularly, Lord Samuel pointed out, when the strikes of the 1890-1900 period took place. Then the working man saw his boss as the enemy, and "when that same boss turned up in Parliament as a Liberal M.P." the worker began to have second thoughts about his party.

2. At the time of the Boer War, Lord Samuel said, the working classes were as divided as anyone else, and the Pro-Boer element was a very small one. He went on to say, however, that the Liberal Imperialists [with the exception of Lord Rosebery, whom Lord Samuel called a Whig] were undoubtedly the most collectivist group within the party. He stressed that there were two issues, Imperialism and Social Reform, and that the group which was most associated with the former also tended to be the

strongest supporter of the latter. By 1901 the country as a whole, and certainly most Liberals, endorsed the sentiments expressed by Campbell-Bannerman in his famous "methods of barbarism" speech. Therefore, while Lord Samuel did not say so, it can certainly be inferred from his remarks that the Liberal Imperialists were to some extent alienated from the mass of working-class sentiment on the war, at least in its later stages, and were thus out of touch with the working classes more than would otherwise have been the case.

3. The causes of the 1906 election victory. Lord Samuel here amplified the account given in his Memoirs as to reasons for the great Liberal success. He listed the mismanagement of the war and Chinese "slavery" in South Africa, the Education question, the Liquor problem, the attack on Free Trade; all of these were Conservative blunders, but most important of all was the split in the Conservative Party itself. He stressed that when a party goes to the polls in a state of division amongst leaders it can never be victorious. When I asked what part the Liberal programme played in all of this Lord Samuel replied: "That was a factor, too," but implied that the other issues were of considerably greater importance.[1] He said, moreover, that normally the

1. Four years earlier, Lord Samuel wrote to a friend of mine: "The very large majority of the Liberal Party at the General Election of January, 1906, had been due to a combination of circumstances not likely to recur." /Gwyn, W. B.: Parliament Remuneration in England, a Master's Thesis submitted to the University of Virginia, August, 1952. The letter from Viscount Samuel was dated December 19, 1951./

pendulum would have swung back in 1900; that it had not done so was due to the fact of the war; when it did swing back, therefore, the reaction was much sharper and more positive than would normally have been the case and this factor, together with the Taff Vale decision and the power of the business classes, made for a much stronger Labour Party in Parliament than would have been likely had the Liberal Party won in 1900. Lord Samuel said Rosebery was a Whig, Harcourt "anything but a strong social reformer", Morley "a follower of Mill and essentially an individualist", and Campbell-Bannerman "only partially favourable to social reform." Therefore it was only with the change of Prime Minister in 1908 that the group which Lord Samuel calls the leading collectivist group in the party held ascendancy, and by that time they were not the most left-wing group in Parliament.

Viscount Samuel was born on November 6, 1870.

APPENDIX III

On December 24, 1955, Sir Charles Trevelyan, Bart., once a Liberal, a member of a distinguished Liberal family, a Liberal M.P. from 1899, and later a Labour Cabinet Minister, sent to me a letter from which I quote. Although Sir Charles's recollections are largely different from the conclusions of my own researches, they are of great value, as he, together with Lord Samuel, is the only man alive today to have been an active Liberal politician before 1900.

> "The answer to your questions is not in the least simple. I am not, even now, prepared to say that if the Great War had not occurred the Liberal Party would not have been the main organ of social change. The great Liberal Period between 1906 and 1913 was much the most revolutionary in my long life. The smashing of the House of Lords in 1910-1911 was the direct result of Lloyd George's equalitarian budget, and it was done by the same forces that in 1945 carried the Labour programme of the first independent Labour Government.
>
> "Lloyd George by his land programme before the first war was harnessing to the Liberal Party the forces which eventually became Labour. If it hadn't been for the war there would probably have been some kind of coalition between Lloyd-George Liberalism, Trade Unionism and Socialist Labour which would have dominated in a few years. We English don't bother about theory

much, for good or ill. It didn't much matter that theoretical Liberalism was laissez faire. I had the whole of my Yorkshire working class behind me in a typical Yorkshire radical constituency, for what we should now call call a Welfare State programme.

"What smashed the Liberal Party was the war, their blundering into it and not knowing how to blunder out of it. The political working-class ceased to think them any good and looked round for their own organisation. So they made the Labour Party, as they had made the Trade Unions and the Co-operative Societies, to meet a new need.

"To say that Liberalism as a political force was moribund is ridiculous in face of the biggest political victory there has ever been in 1906. That victory resulted directly in the class equalitarian, Welfare State Budget of Lloyd George and the smashing of the main class obstacle to socialism, the House of Lords. Liberalism had served the working class well up to the war."

Along with his letter, however, Sir Charles sent a long pamphlet which he had written in 1921, entitled <u>From Liberalism to Labour</u>, which is of special interest, since he was, his letter explains, "one of the first important Liberals to openly join the Labour Party after the war". The pamphlet expresses opinions which vary from the letter quoted above. Explaining that until the First World War he had believed that

a "complete democracy and new economic society" was obtainable by means of the Liberal Party, Sir Charles nevertheless continues: "I had no illusions as to the sections comprised in the Liberal Party who feared attacks on property more than they feared reaction and who regarded Labour as more their foe than Conservatism. But this section did not control Liberal policy in many of the greatest decisions. And possessing, as the Party did, the Whig tradition that great concessions were wiser than stubborn resistance, I always hoped that the advanced mass of Radicalism could eventually sway the Party to the choice of progress. Nor do I feel that my estimate was essentially false. For in Home Government I do not think that before the war there was a public opinion which would have supported as the predominant party one prepared for considerable Socialist experiment or very fundamental change. I am satisfied that the more opportunist progress, embodied in Mr. Lloyd George's Budget of 1909 and the effective destruction of the power of the House of Lords on the political side, was the most which could in any case have issued from the generation of British people who elected the Parliament of 1906. <u>But to me the work of that period was preparatory to a larger advance. We were opening the door for Social Democracy. And I was always sceptical as to whether the Liberal Party could be brought to act as the principal instrument of the inevitable social revolution. Even without the war it is more than doubtful whether the</u>

mass of Radical voters would not have transferred their allegiance to Labour within a very few years."[1] In modified form, these statements reproduce the central argument of this thesis. In the pamphlet Sir Charles goes on to state: "In the decade before the war there was always a good chance that the Radical view might prevail in the Liberal Party. The working-class vote in the industrial north had put the Party in power. The industrial population was not yet consciously Socialist. It was therefore attached to a Party which could make practical headway in social reform. But the Radicals had always an uphill task. The headquarters of Liberalism was far away to the right in sympathy, except for the single energetic personality of Mr. Lloyd George."[2]

Sir Charles Trevelyan was born on October 28, 1870.

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1. pp. 20-22. Emphasis added.

2. p. 59.

APPENDIX IV

On January 18th, 1956, Dr. Gilbert Murray, O.M., kindly granted me an interview of an hour, during which we discussed the general subject of this thesis. In referring to its central point, that of why the advanced working-class leadership tended to desert the Liberal Party, Dr. Murray said: "The Liberals built up the democratic state, and you can't expect the great mass of a nation to be idealist or unselfish." Once the working-classes were granted education and political power, they wanted to form their own party and to have independent labour action. "As long as the Liberals were the obvious party, both in opposition and as a Government, Labour stayed with them. In trade disputes, Liberals generally sided with the working man. But when it looked as if the Liberals would no longer be a source of strength, then the working-class leadership felt it was time to form their own party."

This came, Dr. Murray said, when the great Home Rule crisis arose in 1886. While "Home Rule was the occasion, not the cause" of working-class disaffection, Dr. Murray stressed heavily that it was the Home Rule issue which was the great catalyst to Labour independence. "Then Mr. Gladstone brought in the Home Rule Bill, which was - I think - definitely right, but which was based on an objective study of the situation, and did nothing for the working classes." Liberalism, Dr. Murray emphasised, was and is "a mixture of enlightenment

and democracy. The real essence of Liberalism is freedom. The Liberals had the conviction that England should move towards further democracy, but on idealistic grounds." Now Home Rule came, and the Liberal Party split. Even among those Liberals who did not become Unionists, there was sentiment in favour of dropping Home Rule, or relegating it to a minor role. "There was a long period in the Liberal Party when there was a great silent - or almost silent - dispute. One faction said we must be loyal to Home Rule, while the other said don't go on talking about it, let it be secondary." But due to the great loss of Liberal strength incurred in and after 1886 the working man was now thinking of a new party. Dr. Murray said: "Personal interest is always a very strong factor, and when you said to the ordinary working-man - vote for the people who support the working classes," the worker began now to agree. But "the ordinary Liberal thought it would be unconscientious to drop Home Rule," and this fact plus the great predominance of Mr. Gladstone kept Home Rule foremost in the Liberal programme.

In discussing Mr. Gladstone personally, Dr. Murray said that he was the greatest statesman of whom he knew. Moreover: "[Sir Edward] Grey told me that taking him all round he was greater than any man he had ever met." But what animated Mr. Gladstone above all else was a moral sense. "Only he could keep the ordinary worker interested in questions of great moral importance." Gladstone would suddenly get excited about questions, and in popular campaigns would enlist

huge popular support. Suddenly an issue would strike him and "he got hot about it". But even Gladstone could not keep permanent public interest in the moral issue of Home Rule. Dr. Murray agreed that Gladstone's long pre-eminence after 1886 hurt the party, as his only - or almost his only - programme was Home Rule and many Liberals wanted only what he did, because he did. "Mr Gladstone was rather unconscious of social questions." He paid very little heed to them, damaging to the Liberal Party at a time when the working classes were beginning to stir. It was "quite possible" that he kept the party from social problems, though "at any moment they might have got onto his conscience." It was true that "he did nothing about social problems."

Dr. Murray said that the Liberals were "silly to stick to Home Rule" as they did, and that it was this fixation which did them great harm with the public. I suggested to him that the Liberal leadership, dominated by Gladstone, was uninterested in the New Unionism, and that good, strong leadership might have done much to take up the working-class cause. He agreed, and said that "Harcourt was an unsatisfactory person in many ways . . . Morley was not an absolutely first-rate politician and was very anti-Socialist . . . We were disappointed by Rosebery. He was a strange man. He could make very good speeches, but was not sound in foreign policy and didn't have the Liberal faith." Dr. Murray said that the old political Liberalism could have done much more to

enlist working-class support than it did and more to adopt social welfare policies. The Newcastle Programme was popular, he said, though "some people thought it went too far". It was not a coherent programme, but was "an appeal to interests rather than an appeal to the conscience of the country. Mr. G. could make the country think of its conscience, but no one else could." Dr. Murray emphasised that it was not the appeal of socialism per se which attracted people. "Human nature being what it is, the mass of the working-classes is not interested in theoretical socialism unless it expects to be benefited." But Dr. Murray emphasised that many young Liberals were far more advanced than the leadership, specifically mentioning his friend J. L. Hammond, the great historian.

I asked Dr. Murray if Joseph Chamberlain might have been a successful Radical leader had not the Home Rule issue intervened. He was rather dubious as to whether Chamberlain might not have become a Unionist in any event, due to his strong Imperialist convictions, and said frankly that when he [Dr. Murray] was a young don at Glasgow and Chamberlain was the Lord Rector, about 1890: "I rather hated him - but he was a very adroit speaker and spoke very well." Reminiscing about the "unauthorised campaign" of 1885 [at which time he was 19] Dr. Murray said it was very popular with young Liberals and in the country. "We all thought Chamberlain would be the next leader." Would this have been popular with the Liberals? I asked. Dr. Murray replied: "I should think so.

He seemed the obvious person." He agreed that a Chamberlain leadership would have transformed the party.

Dr. Murray said that the old Whigs were a class type and that in any event most of them, notably Hartington, would have tended to drop out of the Liberal Party. But there was a Whig group which was "fanatic" about certain principles, notably liberty, freedom of conscience, and the rights of oppressed nationalities. Most of this latter group stayed Liberal despite Home Rule, thus constituting a conservative force in the party.

In reference to the Boer War, Dr. Murray said: "All the good Liberals - people with Liberal principles - were very unhappy about it." Some came out strongly, but a great many like Asquith said that "since we were in it it was our duty to win it." The "Pro-Boers" carried on the main tradition of Liberalism, and it was remarkable that "never since the Boer War has the country committed an aggression." A foreshadowing of this could be seen in the great surge to Liberalism after the war had ended. Dr. Murray said that there had been a good deal of liaison between Pro-Boers and the Independent Labour Party because of the war. He said: "I remember a meeting at which Hardie, [Sir Wilfrid] Lawson and I represented a moderate party in opposition to the Boer War." Dr. Murray said that Hardie had worked closely with a group of Liberals.

Finally, I asked him about the Liberal success of 1906 and the subsequent Government. Dr. Murray said that in 1910 the anti-Lords cry "was a good old tried" issue but one which did not matter much any more. He went on: "I rather think that we expected more than we got from the great majority of 1906," especially in respect to social reform.

Dr. Gilbert Murray was born on January 2nd, 1866.

APPENDIX V

On February 10th, 1956, Lord Russell [Bertrand Russell], O.M., kindly granted me an interview of over an hour in which we discussed the Liberal decline in the 1880-1900 period. While he attributed the chief reason for the subsequent Liberal collapse to the First World War and the Asquith-Lloyd George split, Lord Russell readily admitted that in the 1880-1900 period the road was paved to the later Liberal catastrophe. Several points stand out saliently from the interview.

1. "The essential act," Lord Russell said, "was the Reform Act of 1884." This gave to working-men "a sense of importance", and though it took them some time to use their votes "a Labour Party became inevitable after 1884". I pointed out that, while the 1884 Act added 2 million voters to the rolls, the town workers had largely been enfranchised in 1867. Lord Russell agreed, but pointed out that mining areas were enfranchised after 1884 and that the Act gave to the working-class generally a desire to form their own party.

2. Lord Russell said that Gladstone's long retention of power did not really harm the Liberal Party, and agreed with a friend of his that "even Gladstone's trousers had more power" than the other Liberal leaders. In Lord Russell's opinion, however, "the Liberal Party would never have taken up Home Rule [in 1886] if it hadn't been for the need of Irish votes."

3. Lord Russell agreed that the Liberal Party was unwise in not making the necessary concessions to working-class opinion before it was too late. Why was this? I asked. Lord Russell replied: "People in power are always like that - it's difficult for people in power to make the necessary concessions. Power rested with the middle class and the middle class didn't want to give it up." Lord Russell drew a comparison with the French aristocracy before 1789. He said also that "undoubtedly a very important point" was that so many Liberals were business men and opposed to any social reforming legislation. He instanced Lancashire, where "many employers were Liberals <u>solely</u> because of free trade." This was true of many other Liberal M.P.'s in the '90's as well, Lord Russell said; there were many Liberal businessmen who kept their party allegiance only because "they relied on the export trade".

4. With regard to the Liberal Governments of 1892-1895, Lord Russell said that their record had been "quite disastrous - Rosebery was no good at all." He was "one of the most inept people who ever lived. His Government was a complete and utter fiasco; it kept bringing in Bills which were either not passed in the Commons or rejected by the Lords." He said that he could not understand what any Liberal saw in Lord Rosebery, who had no ability or foresight, and who was concerned almost entirely with foreign affairs and imperialism

5. I pointed out that after 1895 some Liberals said that the party had promised too much in 1892 and 1895, others that it had not promised a broad enough social programme. What did Lord Russell think? He replied that what really lost the 1895 election, outside of opposition to Home Rule, was the disastrous record of 1892-1895. "The country would have voted Tory no matter what was put before it. No programme under the sun would have got them [i.e., the Liberals] back."

6. In regard to the years after 1895, I suggested to Lord Russell that there was a strong movement in the country for social reform but that the Liberal did little or nothing about it. He agreed, saying that after 1895 the Liberal leaders "felt they had been smashed up and defeated and weren't doing anything." He went on: "There was no opposition to the immense wealth that came from South Africa; the whole country was bribed by wealth from South Africa." He said that while the Rosebery Government was still in power it had known of and encouraged the preparations which were being made for the Jameson Raid. Saying that he had excellent contemporary sources for this statement ["I knew the people concerned"] Lord Russell added that "troops which normally came home via Suez were routed by the Liberal Government to go via South Africa," to help, if necessary, with the rebellion. This was probably known to only a few

members of the Government, but it was the reason why, at the Committee of Enquiry, "the Liberals on the Committee looked so silly. This hurt them very much in the country." Chamberlain, who was under the threat of being exposed by Cecil Rhodes, himself held a bludgeon over the Liberals, by threatening to expose them. In any event, Lord Russell said, the whole episode was a very severe one for the Liberals.

7. At the 1900 election, Lord Russell said, there was virtually no Liberal domestic programme. The election revolved about the war like the one of 1918, and the atmosphere was highly fraught with emotion, as in the American election of 1952 when Republicans charged the Democrats with "twenty years of treason". The Liberal Imperialists were not on the left of the party, Lord Russell said: "they were not left-wing at all. They were very loath to take action." He mentioned in particular Grey, Haldane and Asquith as being conservative and slow, both in the opposition years and after 1906. With regard to the Taff Vale decision of 1900-1901, which Lord Russell described as "a very burning issue", Grey, Haldane and Asquith "had to be shoved and pushed into altering it." Haldane turned Labour only because the Liberal Party had "dropped him" before the war. Before the rise of Lloyd George, whom Lord Russell agreed was before 1900 commonly regarded only as a spokesman of Welsh Radicalism and not widely popular [Lord Russell instanced his flight from

Birmingham disguised as a policeman in the 1900 compaign7, "I don't think there were any powerful Liberal left-wing spokesmen." The Boer war had the effect, Lord Russell said, of alienating "a great many working-class leaders". It was "not a numerically large group, but the people who opposed the war were important." These people tended to desert the Liberal Party as being too much bound up with Imperialism. "They formed the formative opinion which afterwards became Labour." Many people, middle-class as well as working-class, who opposed the war "were afterwards to become Labour".

Lord Russell was born on May 18, 1872.

APPENDIX VI

We have, above, analysed the occupation of Liberal M.P.'s in 1880, 1887, and 1892. J. Alun Thomas, in his The House of Commons, 1832-1901 [Cardiff, 1939], has analysed the economic interests of Liberal M.P.'s. As many had more than one interest, the total of course greatly exceeds the number of M.P.'s at any one time. We reproduce the figures for the six elections from 1880 to 1900. [Thomas, p. 14].

	1880	1885	1886	1892	1895	1900
Landholders	159	92	59	47	31	30
Army	34	15	4	9	5	10
Navy	4	5	5	1	-	-
Cotton and other textiles	20	17	19	24	16	16
Colliery proprietors	15	24	17	18	11	13
Finance	151	106	70	81	49	40
Railways	62	44	20	24	16	17
Shipping and Transport	35	26	20	24	17	18
Metals	32	29	20	25	16	14
Engineering	18	26	19	34	18	20
Manufacturing (misc.)	29	19	16	17	10	21
Brewers and distillers	8	7	7	7	3	1
Merchants	61	47	33	38	26	22
Newspaper proprietors	11	10	7	10	6	8
Lawyers	77	57	45	64	47	40
Men of letters and dons	40	44	31	36	28	31
Civil and Diplomatic Services	4	5	5	2	2	1

	1880	1885	1886	1892	1895	1900
Architects and Engineers	2	3	2	1	1	2
Journalists	8	5	4	10	7	10
Doctors of Medicine	3	5	2	2	1	1
Other professions	12	15	8	12	9	11
Workingmen's representatives	2	8	6	7	7	6

Though the total number of Liberal M.P.'s declined sharply in this period, we note nevertheless the marked drop in landholders, army and navy men, financial interests, and to some extent the business group generally.

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